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Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs

Nadia Maria El Cheikh

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To George F. Haddad and Soraya A. Saliba

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Preface

This book studies the Arabic-Islamic view of Byzantium as it evolved through centuries of contact, exchanges, and warfare and as it reflected developments from the first/seventh century to the fall of Constantinople in the ninth/fifteenth century. Each chapter examines an era that was dominated with particular traditions and views of the Byzantines. Topics were selected based on the availability of a critical mass of information and on my assessment of their importance and typicality. This study is by no means exhaustive. Instead, I have focused on a few themes and a few aspects of a highly complex image. My hope is that historians of Islam and of Byzantium will further lines of inquiry and argument concerning various aspects of Muslim-Byzantine relations.

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Some of the material in this book has been discussed or has appeared in somewhat different versions in the following journals and edited volumes: "Describing the Other to Get at the Self: Byzantine Women in Arabic Sources (8th–11th Centuries)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40 (1997): 239–250; "*Sūrat al-Rūm:* A Study of the Exegetical Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): 356–364; "The Contribution of Christian Arab Historians to Muslim Historiography on Byzantium," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999): 45–60;

"Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 5–21; "Byzantium through the Islamic Prism: Twelfth–Thirteenth Centuries," *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, eds. A. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), 53–69.

Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs

Introduction

The history of Muslim-Byzantine relations begins with the inception of Islam in the first/seventh century and continues to the fall of the Byzantine empire in A.D. 1453. From the early days of Islamic expansion, which came only decades after the revelation of the new faith, the Islamic community was in a state of enmity with Byzantium. After the collapse of the Persian empire in the first/seventh century, the Byzantine state remained the primary power that was capable of opposing the nascent Islamic community. Muslim expeditions against Byzantine territory were undertaken on a regular basis, and the early skirmishes between Islam and Byzantium, the unsuccessful Muslim attempts to capture Constantinople, and the establishment of defined frontiers between the two powers all served to fix Byzantium as Islam's principal enemy. Hence, although the early caliphate expanded to the east, west, and north, the Byzantine frontier became the constant focus of Arab attention. This conflict necessarily directed the orientation of the medieval Arabic-Islamic sources, and in many instances, military and political affairs dominated the major chronicles and historical works. For instance, the Muslim chronicler al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) lists at the end of each year's annals the raids on Byzantine territory that were carried out by the Muslims.

This preoccupation with warfare between the two empires ultimately led to a distorted overview of Muslim-Byzantine relations, for there was also a less adversarial side to the relations between Byzantium and the Muslims. Treaties were frequently signed, the frontiers were more or less stable for long periods, and campaigning across the frontier eventually attained a ritual quality. Paradoxically, the permanent state of war did not discourage peaceful contacts, which arose in a variety of contexts—through continuous commercial relations, the exchange of embassies, the internment and ransom of prisoners of war, the deportation of conquered urban populations, the movements of traitors and exiles, the Byzantine women kept as harem slaves, the conclusion of truces, the relations between the eastern patriarchates and the patriarch of Constantinople, and pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In addition, a few Byzantine emperors, such as Leo VI (r. A.D. 886–912) and Alexander (r. A.D. 912–913), had Muslim advisers, just as Muslim caliphs used Christian and sometimes Byzantine civil servants and counselors.[1]

The frontier was a barrier but also a point of contact. If according to Islamic legal theory a state of war exists between *dār al-islām* (territory of Islam) and *dār al-ḥarb* (territory of war), brief spans of peace are possible whether by a peace treaty or by an *amān* (safe-conduct), which helps to explain the ease with which Muslims and non-Muslims crossed frontiers.[2] Thus, a citizen of Byzantium might obtain permission to take up residence in Muslim territory to engage in commerce. Similarly, by the fourth/tenth century, Muslim merchants were established in Trebizond, in some towns in Bithynia, and even in the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Cultural and political frontiers seldom, if ever, coincided; indeed, residents at the peripheries of both empires developed a common frontier culture that included a shared tradition of epic poetry. Thus, a semiporous border permitted the exchange of ideas and standards, manners and customs, languages and literatures. The result of this interpenetration was the diffusion of culture, political ideas and institutions, military techniques, material goods, and methods of economic production.[3] Byzantium was not, therefore, a strange and wonderful land. It was relatively well known, leaving limited room for fantastic speculation. Moreover, as heirs to the Abrahamic tradition, the Byzantines and the Muslims shared a common linear historical outlook that led from the first day of creation to the certainty of God's final judgment. This similarity in religious perspectives and ethical standards meant that each was able to understand the slogans and reasoning of the other. Indeed, the Muslims felt closer to the Byzantine empire, both religiously and culturally, than it did to any other power. In fact, Islamic civilization adopted substantial features from Byzantium, such as concepts of state and administration and elements of its material and intellectual culture. Consequently, any analysis of the various aspects of the Arab Muslim image of the Byzantine empire must acknowledge the effect that Byzantium had on the developing Islamic civilization and also the state of perpetual warfare between them.

Islam and Byzantium were in a changing and dialectically constituted historical relationship with one another. By adopting a literary critical approach, the present work is able to trace the Arabic-Islamic view of Byzantium as it evolved through centuries of warfare, contact, and exchanges in the context of regional historical developments. The literature on this subject is limited, although studies are increasingly being published on various aspects of East-West interactions and perceptions during medieval times. Works instigated by the recent debate on Orientalism and by the renewed Christian-Muslim dialogue have tackled the issue of perception and representation, but only a few scholars have handled the issue from the specific perspective of Arab-Byzantine relations. Instead, most such works have focused on the relations between the Muslim East and the Latin West. These studies are, moreover, rooted in an ideological project that seeks to understand the antecedents of the current problematic relationship between Islam and the West. For example, Muhammad Nūr al-Dīn Afāya concludes the introduction to his recent Arabic work—entitled, in English, *The Imagined West*—by saying that he will "try to uncover the stereotypes embedded in the medieval Islamic discourse since some of its expressions continue to be relevant to the crux of the current 'Arab' question about the self and 'other', about Islam and the West."[4]

Several studies on Byzantine perceptions of Arabic-Islamic people, culture, and history are currently available.[5] Arab perceptions of Byzantium have similarly witnessed a cumulative increase in recent years. Marius Canard's work constitutes a fundamental contribution to both Arab-Byzantine relations and mutual perceptions. André Miquel includes an important chapter on the Byzantine empire in his seminal work *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du XIème siècle,* focusing on material written by Arab Muslim geographers of the third/ninth, fourth/tenth, and fifth/eleventh centuries. Ahmad Shboul's *Al-Mas'ūdī and His World* also devotes a chapter to the treatment of the Byzantines that is found in the works of al-Mas'ūdī. An important addition to this scholarship is Mohamed Tahar Mansouri's *Recherches sur les relations entre Byzance et l'Égypte (1259–1453) (d'après les sources arabes)*. Finally, various articles published in a large variety of journals and collected works have contributed to enhancing our understanding of the Arab's image of Byzantium.[6]

Byzantium played an inestimable role in the collective imagination of Arabic-Islamic societies. Knowledge of the Byzantine empire was not marginalized and confined to isolated Muslim scholars: Byzantium was a topic of unlimited concern, and information about it was vital to the military and political decisions taken by the caliphate, to commercial interests, and even to the every day concerns of ordinary Muslims. Hence, Muslim reports on Byzantium are never completely dissociated from references, either explicit or implicit, to the Arabic-Islamic world, and in a number of profound and unspoken ways, the Muslims' own self-definition was connected with the way in which they related to the Byzantines. This book yields relatively little new empirical knowledge about Byzantium, but its investigations into the significance of Byzantium to the Arab Muslim establishment and Muslim appreciation of Byzantine culture and civilization contribute to efforts to find the foundational discourses that underlie Arab Muslim formulations of alterity. By examining the Arab Muslim view of the world, of morality, and of ideal behavior, this book contends that the Arabic-Islamic texts and the representations found within them have helped shape reality and that the emerging civilization's attempt to construct and produce a distinctive identity defined Islam's view of Byzantium to a considerable extent.

ARABIC-ISLAMIC SOURCES

The historical framework of this study stretches from the first/seventh century to the mid-ninth/fifteenth century—from the first reference to Byzantium in the Qur'ān up until the fall of Constantinople in A.D. 1453. Widely varying Arabic-Islamic sources, particularly religious and secular prose texts, were consulted in an attempt to formulate a Muslim image of Byzantium and answer the question of how Muslim society marked its internal and external boundaries and defined "otherness."

One major challenge to examining initial contacts between Byzantium and the early Muslim *umma* arises from the controversy surrounding the traditional Islamic account of Islamic origins. Indeed, the traditional Arabic-Islamic sources are not contemporaneous with the events they purport to relate and sometimes were written many centuries later. These sources contain internal complexities, anachronisms, discrepancies, and contradictions. Moreover, many of them provide evidence of embellishment and invention that were introduced to serve the purposes of political or religious apologetic.[7] A number of critics have turned to contemporary evidence from outside the Muslim community to construct what they felt might be a more historically accurate vision of Islam's origins and early developments.[8] The object in the present endeavor, however, is not to confirm or refute a core of data about historical Byzantium and early Islam but to study the contribution of this Arabic-Islamic corpus to the discourse on Byzantium.

Texts interacts with one another and with contexts in complex ways. In rejecting an opposition between text and reality, critics have noted that texts do not simply exist as a prelinguistic reality that language faithfully describes. Rather, reality is "always already" situated in or shaped by textual processes.[9] The Islamic texts in question partook in this complexity and had to conform to the conventions of their respective genres. Since no writing took place in the abstract, the representations were dependent on traditions and orthodoxy. Writers came to assume that their audience possessed some previous knowledge of Byzantium to which they referred and on which they relied. Thus, a work that included material on Byzantium affiliated itself with other works containing similar material.

Some of these texts are compilations, such as the canonical collections of prophetic traditions. *Ḥadīth* literature is a unique body of material. Compiled in the two centuries following the death of the Prophet in 11/632, it records the actions, words, and tacit approvals attributed to the Prophet. The material of early *ḥadīth* was an undifferentiated mass of individual reports including legal injunctions, rituals, ethical conduct, eschatology, the virtues of individual tribes, biographical fragments, the Prophet's expeditions, correct manners, admonitions, and homilies. *Ḥadīth* rapidly asserted its authority as a repository of the community's early religious and historical experiences.[10] The *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (d. 261/874) brought together everything that was recognized as genuine in the orthodox circles in the third/ninth century. The material included in the books of tradition is comprehensive and deals with large domains of Muslim life. Collections of *ḥadīth* include apocalyptic traditions that involve the city of Constantinople in addition to other Byzantine material.

Qur'anic exegesis *(tafsīr)* is one of the most important branches of Qur'anic science. Qur'ān commentaries have, in recent years, been exploited to "reconstruct trends and motivations in exegesis as revealed by the use and invention of textual and orthographic variants to the Qur'ān." One of the functions of interpretation is to adapt the text to the present situation of the interpreter, making the text applicable to the faith and way of life of the believers and aligning it with established social custom, legal position, and doctrinal assertions.[11] Exegetical commentaries contain copious explanations on the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* that refer to the Byzantine-Persian wars of the early first/seventh century.

Works more historical in nature, such as the *Sīra* (biography of the Prophet) of Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828), which holds pride of place in the Islamic tradition, contain several references to the Byzantines in various contexts, including warfare, justice, trade, and diplomatic relations with Emperor Heraclius. The conquest literature, which chronicles the early conflict between Byzantium and the Arab-Muslim forces, digresses to include a substantial amount of information on Byzantine leaders. The most directly relevant titles are *Kitāb futūḥ al-Shām* by Abū Ismāʿīl al-Azdī, and *Kitāb al-futūḥ* by Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī.[12] This literature is especially important for its depiction of the first encounters between Arab Muslims and Byzantines.

The best-known historical digests are *al-Akhbār al-tiwāl* of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. 282/895) and the *Tārīkh* of al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 283/897), which provide quick and rather synthetical exposés. Al-Dīnawarī's work is characterized by a quasi-exclusive interest in Iranian pre-Islamic and Islamic history. Al-Yaʿqūbī reflects in his work an ecumenical mind dealing in the first part with pre-Islamic history and enumerating the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Indians, the Greeks, the *Rūm*, the Chinese, and others. The second part of the work gives the history of the caliphate up to the year 259/872. It is arranged according to the reigns of caliphs.

The culminating point of Arab annalistic historiography was achieved in the work of Abū Jaʿfar b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* is a monumental corpus that represents the ancient historical tradition and preserves the broadest cross-section of earlier historical writing. It is an ambitious narrative that begins with creation and ends with the year 302/915. Al-Ṭabarī combined the history of creation and prophecy with the history of ancient nations, adding to them a biography of Muḥammad, a retelling of the conquests, and the history of the community down to his own time. His history became the preeminent example of the annalistic tradition. In the later period, the compilation of universal chronicles continued, notably, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232). *Al-Kāmil* is wide in its geographical range and covers events from creation to 628/1230–1231. It is particularly valuable for Muslim representation of Byzantium in the fourth/tenth, fifth/eleventh, and sixth/twelfth centuries. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382) wrote a universal history, the *ʿIbar,* which is particularly useful for the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. The most notable historians of late Mamluk period are al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), and Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1524).

Material on Byzantium is also found in biographical dictionaries. Biographical notices began at a very early period in Arabic historiography. The genre is exemplified in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), which lists distinguished companions and successors in order of seniority in Islam. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (663/1071) includes in his *Tārīkh Baghdād* anyone of importance who has spent time in the city of Baghdad. Most important for our purposes is the topographical introduction that he provides of the Abbasid capital. The genre witnessed prolific periods, especially under the Mamluks. Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) produced a comprehensive dictionary of notables in all fields and ages, while the importance of *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubra* of al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) lies in having preserved an exchange of poems involving the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus Phocas.[13]

One of the most important bodies of sources in relation to the image of Byzantium and the Byzantines is the geographical literature. The geographers of the early "Iraqi" school included in their treatment of the world a chapter on the Byzantines. Ibn Khurradadhbeh (d. 300/911) composed *al-Masālik wa al-mamālik,* in which he furnishes itineraries that describe routes connecting provinces and towns. His work obtained wide circulation and was utilized by many scholars. Ibn Rusteh's *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa,* written between 290 and 300/903–913, includes the most detailed description of Constantinople written in Arabic up to his own days. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī's *Kitāb al-buldān* was written around 290/903 and contains traditions and information of legendary character. Among the geographers of the "Balkhī" or classical school, Ibn Ḥawqal, in his *Ṣūrat al-arḍ* completed in c. 378/988, provides a full-length chapter on the lands of *al-Rūm.*

The one Arab-Muslim author to deal systematically with Byzantine history after the rise of Islam and until his own day was al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), at once a historian, a geographer, a traveler, and a man of letters.[14] In *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawhar,* the discussion of all nations known to the Muslims of the fourth/tenth century comprises almost one-half of the whole work. His *al-Tanbīh wa al-ishrāf* is a condensed and comprehensive account embracing different aspects of geographical and universal history. The political history is updated to the time of writing, which is 345/956.

Among the later important world geographies is the work of al-Idrīsī (d. 556/1166), completed at Palermo, under the patronage of the Norman king Roger II. The work was an important contribution to physical and descriptive geography. Yāqūt al-Ḥamwī (d. 626/1229) produced one of the most useful works in Arabic geographical literature—*Muʿjam al-buldān,* in which he collected, arranged, and systematized the topography of the world known to him. These works included information on the Byzantine empire, particularly physical descriptions of its capital, Constantinople. Among the most outstanding travel accounts of the later period are the *riḥlas* of Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377). Both travelers came from the Muslim West, a century and a half apart, and have left accounts of their experiences in the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean, including Byzantium.

My sources also include works that, although they display a great deal of variety, all belong to the genre of *adab*. The term *adab* is hard to define, encompassing, as it does, various literal and metaphorical meanings. Traditionally *adab* has been used to refer to the profane literature as distinct from *‘ilm,* which sums up the religious sciences. It has been defined to include the "best" of what had been said in the form of verse, prose, aphorism, and anecdotes on every conceivable subject that an educated man, an *adīb,* is supposed to know. *Adab* also purports to deal with a wide range of problems of language, literature, and ethical and practical behavior.[15] One of the most famous prose writers, author of works of *adab* and politico-religious polemics, was al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–869). Several of his works include references to the Byzantines—notably, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān,* which is the first comprehensive study of animals in Arabic; *al-Bukhalā’,* which is an attack on avarice; and *Risāla fī al-radd ‘ala al-naṣāra* [Letter on Refuting the Christians], which he wrote at the order of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/833–842).

Because anecdotes about the Byzantines are scattered in *adab* texts and are encountered in a fortuitous, almost accidental manner, the reader must consult a large number of *adab* texts and compilations. References to Byzantium are found, for instance, in the compilation of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *‘Uyūn al-akhbār,* an anthology of literary reports drawn from many quarters; in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 365/975), a work about poets and singers of the pre-Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid periods; and in the anthologies of al-Muḥassin b.‘Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994), which contain material for the social history of the third/ninth and fouth/tenth centuries—namely, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa akhbār al-mudhākara* and *al-Faraj ba‘da al-shidda.* Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) wrote his *Kitāb al-imtā‘ wa al-mu’ānasa* while he was a courtier at the Buyid court. He divided it into forty nights or sessions, two of which, the sixth and fourteenth, allude to Byzantium. In later times, al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) compiled *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab,* an encyclopaedia covering the events of the years from the later Ayyubids through 700/1300. The most monumental of chancery guides, an encyclopaedia that draws on the works of preceding writers, is the *Subḥ al-a‘shā fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā* of al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418). His work covers the whole range of information needed by chancery clerks in the Mamluk sultanate.

The texts to be examined represent a broad spectrum of genres and styles developed over a long period of time. Considering the extent and variety of the sources consulted, a certain unevenness of coverage is virtually guaranteed. The danger of overlooking some bit of information or of attaching too much importance to some other is ever-present; some texts, authors, ideas, and images are bound to be omitted from this analysis.

The sources are disparate and unfold to reveal multiple images. Information about Byzantium is not immediately assimilated; first the layer of previous information already fixed in tradition needs to be pierced. Our authors and compilers depended on earlier "pretexts," and these intertextual references created a dynamic relationship between present and prior texts.[16] Each text bears a whole network of articulated themes and assumptions whose meaning links up with other texts, genres, or topics of discourse. This is at the heart of the semiotic perspective that has disturbed traditional notions of authors as centered subjects in conscious control of their utterances. One important shift in medieval historiography has been the transformation of history from narration to representation, "a recognition that the past occurs only through the mediatory and mediating texts that it bequeaths and that, therefore, what is recovered is not as much the truth of the past as the images of itself that it produces, images conditioned, indeed determined, by its ambient and historically determinate, discourses."[17] Critics have pointed to the complicated relationship between the claim to be telling the truth about the past and the conventional representations in which such truths were expressed.[18] History's postmodern anxiety over the status and meaning of reality is here circumvented by an awareness that this effort is directed toward disclosing a discourse—that we are trying to uncover a representation, not reality.

Yet another important issue concerns the audience, for the texts examined in this book belonged to the literature of the elite. The geographer al-Muqaddasī (d. 390/1000) makes the status of his readership clear when he declares: "I am writing for the administrator, the great merchant, and whomever is keen on learning."[19] Since this literature maintained itself in the domain of the educated, its physical accessibility to general audiences was limited.[20] As a result, although some of its content must have filtered down to the masses, differences undoubtedly existed between the attitudes of the educated and the uneducated. The sole genre that might potentially furnish a record of the utterances and articulated attitudes of the illiterate masses toward Byzantium is the hero cycle. Such epics can be a valuable reflection of the ideals, aspirations, and concerns of ordinary people in Muslim societies. However, scholars agree that these texts are difficult to use because of uncertainties concerning the identities of the authors, the dates of composition, and the manuscript tradition itself. For instance, H. T. Norris states that the *sīra* of ʿAntar was drafted between 1080 and 1400 but includes both early and late material. Bridget Connelly similarly remarks that "the authorship and the date of these works are generally obscure." Marius Canard, in a series of articles on *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma,* concludes that the epic is formed of two distinct cycles differing in period and origin and that "it is impossible to give an exact date for the composition of the romance."[21] Not only are these texts filled with additions and interpolations; they also do not exist in critical editions. There is no reason to doubt that as soon as these obstacles are surmounted, the epics will provide a great amount of material relevant to the popular mentality in the medieval Arab Muslim world. In the meantime, we must rely on the traces of certain popular beliefs and attitudes that have survived in the works of the literati. In any event, all of our authors wrote with an exclusively Muslim audience in mind, and for most Muslims, reading or hearing a particular text or story was as close as they ever came to Byzantium. The texts had the effect not of challenging but of confirming and consolidating the prevailing conception of Byzantium. There was a complex dialectic of reinforcement "by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this, in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experience."[22]

A HISTORY OF ALTERITY

This book approaches *Homo Islamicus*[23] from various directions to study his mentality, his beliefs, and his own self-portrayal. Indeed, by studying the Muslim image of Byzantium, we learn about differences in cultural and social structures and in psychological systems. Although the conventional ideology that influenced the construction of the image may have been removed from reality, the points that clearly surprised the author and therefore show fundamental differences between the two worlds are of particular interest.

The problem of representation is complex. Questions about difference and the analysis-of-power hierarchies implicit in constructions of the "other" have been central to critiques of "Orientalism" initiated by Edward Said. Said emphasizes that "cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be." Moreover, the what and the how in the representation of things, while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated. E. Sivan similarly wonders whether an image represents the expression of profound and individual attitudes or whether it adheres to stereotypes imposed by social consensus. The Byzantinist Helène Ahrweiler also stresses that the theme of the "image of the Other" touches on the history of "mentalités" above all else. As alterity presupposes identity, the two are fixed realities since they coexist and are subject to mutual interactions. It is an alterity of dialogue, even if it is simultaneously hostile. Alterity implicitly recognizes the other and the existence of a "terrain d'entente" between them. Yves Albert Dauge also talks about "altérité," which is positive, and "aliéneté," which is negative. There is a distinction between the other considered as similar, accepted, and integrated—once modified—and the other rejected as inferior and incompatible. François Hartog describes this inherent complexity in the following way: to posit the other is to posit him as different, to posit that there are two terms *a* and *b* and that *a* is not *b*. However, this difference becomes interesting at the moment when *a* and *b* enter the same system: "Commence alors ce travail incéssant et indéfini qui consiste à ramener l'autre au même." In the end, the other represents viable but alternative ways of thinking and acting.[24]

From the very beginning of Arabic-Islamic historical consciousness, Byzantium served as one of the primary sites of otherness in contrast to which it constituted itself. In other words, Islam defined itself partly in relation to Byzantium's otherness. The Muslim image of Byzantium was frequently informed by the ideas, doctrines, and trends that ruled the culture at specific historical moments. Similarly, the attitudes of the Byzantines themselves also informed Muslim responses, including their creation of a certain image of Byzantium. A dependent correlation existed between the self-image of the Byzantines and that of the Muslims: one was in reciprocal contrast to the other. A kind of mirror image gave rise to the need to postulate the other to define and legitimate what one is to oneself. In many ways, the self-definition of the Arabs was implicitly connected to their way of relating to the Byzantines and the Byzantines' own self-definition. Quite often, the Byzantines are a foil for the emotional or psychological trials of the Arabs. Such a delineation, through a set of contrasts, was dependent on the Muslim self-image. This meant that all perception occurred through the

lenses of their own system of values and beliefs. Consequently, the image of the Byzantines cannot be dissociated from the image of the Muslims constructed by Arab Muslim authors. The two terms, *Byzantine* and *Muslim,* are often found in a relationship of opposition. A culture that differs is perceived as a negation of one set of values rather than as an expression of another system. This means that the literature is bound to be unrealistic in its omissions and representations.

THE TEMPORAL EVOLUTION OF PERCEPTION

The image of Byzantium in the Arabic-Islamic sources was not monolithic across the centuries. Images seem to have responded to changing internal, regional, and international political realities and may be narrated only by acknowledging and referring to the historical development of the Byzantine and Islamic states. In particular, we must take into account the persistent fluctuation of power between the two rivals if we are to understand the evolution of certain images, *topoi,* rhetorical figures, and other similar structures. The Muslims were themselves aware of the continuous changes that befall societies. Al-Tawḥīdī, after dealing with this subject at length, concludes: "With each century, people acquire new habits and a new mentality that they did not possess before."[25] Images developed in conjunction with these new historical realities. Words, phrases, and formulas acquired new meanings in relation to the prevailing historical and cultural contexts. This book traces the image of Byzantium as a contextually construed evolution, responding to developments in the medieval Islamic milieu and reflected in a complex intertextuality. The image, shaped within the text, was used to enhance the image of its Muslim counterpart. Therefore, we witness the growth of a textual tradition on Byzantium that reflects purely internal concerns and that is independent of actual historical phenomena.

The corpus of written material containing references to the Byzantines continues in works in the ninth/fifteenth century. But as early as the sixth/twelfth century, a certain traditional depiction of Byzantium and the Byzantines had been elaborated in the Arabic-Islamic sources. This literary tradition remained vibrant, with later writers freely adopting and adapting material from their predecessors. Later sources juxtaposed contemporary perceptions with earlier views, adapting their arguments, to a certain extent, to the established framework of set patterns, motifs, and polemical programs. A major characteristic of the later Arabic-Islamic sources is an approach that favored compilation and systematization. As a result, in a wide variety of sources, there is often duplication and reproduction from earlier works. An anecdote that first appeared in a third/ninth-century text will reappear, unchanged, in subsequent collections. Thus, while the gradual accumulation of new material provides evidence for historical change and an evolution in perception, continuity predominates in the later sources. One significant consequence of this is that individual contemporary authors might emphasize a particular aspect of Byzantium or bring out a new facet but still convey entrenched images culled from their own various sources. The upshot of all this is that the last centuries reveal slight modifications and alterations of the Muslim tradition on Byzantium as it had principally been elaborated by the Abbasid authors.

In what follows, the Arabic-Islamic representations of the Byzantine empire are considered in terms of a few salient configurations. The texts tended to emphasize, in a disproportionate way, certain discussions, themes, and topics. For each period in the relations between the two rival states, certain factors helped determine the content of the image presented. These factors include the nature of Muslim-Byzantine relations, the particular political and ideological concerns of the time, and the textual tradition located within a particular literary genre. Although this book examines eras during which particular traditions and views of the Byzantines seemingly prevailed, this does not mean that these same traditions and views were absent from earlier or later periods. Furthermore, this study is by no means exhaustive, for many angles remain unexplored. Instead, I have deliberately chosen to focus on a few themes and a few aspects of a highly complex image.

NOTES

1. Marius Canard has elaborated on various aspects of these relations in a number of articles. See, for instance, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 3–56.
2. Non-Muslims who permanently resided in *dār al-islam* were given special status of indefinite duration called *ʿahd*, by which their lives and property were secured and they enjoyed religious tolerance. See Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybānī's Siyar* (Baltimore, 1966), 17–18.
3. D. Obolenski, "Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges," *Actes du XIVème Congrès International des Études Byzantines* (September 1971): 303–313.
4. Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn Afāya, *al-Gharb al-mutakhayyal: Ṣuwar al-ākhar fī al-fikr al-ʿarabī al-islāmī al-waṣīṭ* (Beirut, 2000), 37; see also Tarif Khalidi, "Islamic Views of the West in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 5 (1995): 31–42. Standard works on East-West perceptions include Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1960); R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1962); Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982); and more recently, David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of the Other* (New York, 1999). On Orientalism, in addition to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), see Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Berkeley, 1985); Maxime Rodinson, *La fascination de l'Islam: Les étapes du regard occidental sur le monde musulman* (Paris, 1980). On Christian-Muslim dialogue, see William M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London, 1991); Willem Bijlrfeld, "Christian-Muslim Studies: Islamic Studies and the Future of Christian-Muslim Encounter," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainseville, 1995), 13–40.
5. See, for instance, John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam,"

Dumbarton Oaks Papers 18 (1964): 114–132; Vassilios Christides, *The Image of the Pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine Sources* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970); Alain Ducellier, "Mentalité historique et realités politiques: L'Islam et les Musulmans vus par les Byzantins du XIIIème siècle," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 4 (1972): 31–63; Speros Vryonis, "Byzantine Attitudes towards Islam during the Late Middle Ages," *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* 2 (1981): 263–286; Elizabeth Jeffreys, "The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature," in *Seventeenth International Byzantine Congress at Dumbarton Oaks, 1986* (New York, 1986), 305–323.

6. References to these works are included below, throughout the text, and in the bibliography.
7. Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, 1998), 4–5.
8. See, for instance, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), 3, who state that we cannot use the Islamic sources to reconstruct Islamic origins and urge us to look elsewhere for evidence. In *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), Robert Hoyland appraises non-Muslim writings on early Islam.
9. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, 1985), 128.
10. Tarif Khalidi discusses the origins, mode of transmission, and authenticity of *ḥadīth* in *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1996), 17–28.
11. Andrew Rippin, "The Present Status of Tafsir Studies," *Muslim World* 72 (1982): 224–238. Wilfred Cantwell Smith talks about the "forward career of the *Qur'ān* and its meaning," stating that there was a process of reconstruction of interpretations with successive attempts at making the Qur'ān relevant to particular points of view and situations. In "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Non-Reductionist Interpretation of the Quran," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 11 (1980): 487–505.
12. The most recent study of al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām* has argued that it is a very early work, ca. 200/816; see Suleiman Mourad, "On Early Islamic Historiography: Abū Ismā'īl al-Azdī and His *Futūḥ al-Shām*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000): 577–593. Lawrence I. Conrad suggests that Ibn A'tham compiled his *Futūḥ* in the early third/ninth century bringing it down to the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–193/786–809). It was then continued by two successive Sunni scholars to the reign of al-Muqtadir in the early fourth/tenth century. See Lawrence I. Conrad, "Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature,* ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London, 1998), 1:314.

13. See, on this genre, Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought,* 184–204; Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003), 66–74; and Michael Cooperson's introduction to his *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge, 2000).
14. Ahmad Shboul, *Al-Mas'udi and His World* (Ithaca, 1979), xxv.
15. S. A. Bonebakker has stated that the current definitions of *adab* are "too broad to provide a workable analytic framework," suggesting that a more restricted definition should be used. In "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres," *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Abbasid Belles-Lettres,* ed. Julia Ashtiani et al. (Cambridge, 1990), 16–30.
16. Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge, 1991), 231–232.
17. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, 1997), 73.
18. Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages,* 2.
19. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm,* ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden 1906), 5.
20. Peter Heath, *The Thirsty Sword: Sīrat 'Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic* (Salt Lake City, 1996), 48. André Miquel states that "for want of a truly popular literature, the geographers give us a reasonably good image of the mentality of the average Muslim." See his "Constantinople: ville sans visage," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: moyen age et temps modernes* 96 (1984): 398–403.
21. H. T. Norris, *The Adventures of Antar* (Warminster, 1980), 4; Bridget Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* (Berkeley, 1986), 8; Marius Canard, "Delhemma: Epopée arabe des guerres arabo-byzantines," *Byzantion* 10 (1935): 283–300. Malcom C. Lyons states that the literary construction of the cycles "represents oral accretive tradition, based on the manipulation of narrative stan-

dard ingredients"; in "The Crusading Stratum in the Arabic Hero Cycle," in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria,* ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden, 1993), 147–161.

22. Said, *Orientalism,* 94.
23. In imitation of Alexander Kazhdan's *Homo Byzantinus.* See A. P. Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, 1982).
24. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), 95; Emmanuel Sivan, *L'Islam et la croisade* (Paris, 1968), 6; Helène Ahrweiler, "L'image de l'autre et les mécanismes de l'altérité," *XVIe Congrès international des sciences historiques: Rapport I* (Stuttgart, 1985), 60–66; Yves Albert Dauge, *Le Barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilization* (Brussels, 1981), 315; François Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote: essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris, 1980), 224.
25. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-imtāʿ wa al-muʾānasa,* ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Cairo, 1953), pt. 3:3.

• ONE •

The Encounter with Byzantium

Nomenclature is the first problem that confronts the scholar searching Arabic sources for references to the Byzantines. In part, the confusion stems from Byzantine imperial ideology, for the basic principle behind Byzantine political doctrines is the idea that theirs was the sole legitimate empire. To the Byzantines, their empire was none other than the Roman empire, perfected through Christianity, and they admitted no distinction or discontinuity from antiquity.[1] Thus, their political ideology proclaimed the empire's universal character, founded, as it was, on their Roman heritage and consolidated by their ecumenical Christian ideology. Of course, this ideology was not expressed in precisely the same tone throughout the thousand years of Byzantine history but took on different shades and textures in response to changes in the political circumstances of a given era. During the iconoclastic period, for example, the Byzantine ideal stressed national solidarity to the point of pulling away from Greco-Roman tradition. From the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh centuries, as the empire reached its apogee, the Byzantines attached themselves to a Hellenic past as a way of affirming their cultural superiority over the rest of the world.[2]

By and large, Arab Muslim observers at the empire's periphery accepted this projected, larger-than-life image and viewed the history of the Byzantines as an extension of the histories of ancient Greece and the Roman empire. This led Arab authors to mingle and confuse the names by which they referred to the Byzantines: the term *Rūm* was used to refer interchangeably to the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Christian Melkites, and, later, *al-Rūm* also came to signify one of the subordinate lines of the Muslim Seljuk family in Anatolia. On occasion, *al-Rūm* was used to refer to the ancient Greeks, although the predominant term in that context was *al-Yūnāniyyūn/Yūnān*, a name derived from the Greeks' biblical name: Yonan (Genesis 2:10).[3] The *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* of Ṣā'id al-Andalusī (d. 426/1070) exemplifies some of these usages when describing the Romans in their capital: "The fifth nation is that of the *Rūm*, whose capital was the great Rome. It is a great nation with magnificent kings who ruled until the coming of Constantine, son of Helen." Ṣā'id then refers to the Christianization of the empire by Constantine, who "built a city on the gulf, known as al-Qusṭanṭiniyya, in the middle of the land of the *Yūnān* which has remained the capital until this day." The same author uses *Rūm* when mentioning the Christians living and working in Baghdad.[4] However, most often, in this work and elsewhere, the term *Rūm* refers to the Byzantines, and close scrutiny of the particular context makes the intended meaning manifest.

In *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Mas'ūdī lists various opinions concerning the origin of the *Rūm* and of their name. According to some, the *Rūm* derived their name from the city of Rome; the name of the city was subsequently Arabized, and whoever inhabited it came to be called *Rūm*. Al-Mas'ūdī adds that the *Rūm* called themselves Rominos, a name that the people of the Muslim-Byzantine frontier also used when referring to the Byzantines. He then gives another opinion that attributes the name to one of the ancestors of the *Rūm*, providing two lineages that trace the genealogy of the *Rūm* much as Arab tribes traditionally delineated theirs. Like other Arab authors, al-Mas'ūdī attempts to fit the *Rūm* into the biblical ethnology found in the tenth chapter of Genesis, which lists Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japhet—and the lines of filiation of the various nations ascribed to them. Although a number of Arab authors agree that the Arabs are one of the nations descended from Shem, they disagree about the lineage of the Byzantines. Some ascribe them to Japhet, thus making them kinsmen to the Slavs and Turks, while others attribute them to Shem, making them kinsmen to the Arabs. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), for instance, situates the *Rūm* among the descendants of Shem but also echoes the tradition according to which the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines were descended from Japhet. Through Abū Hurayra, we hear of a tradition that states that Shem was the father of the Arabs, the Persians, and the Byzantines; he adds, "and the good resides among them."[5] This tradition reflects the grudging respect that traditionists rendered to the Persians and Byzantines. At the same time, such genealogical speculation is also tied to a linear view of history "in which all communities are built on a prophetic tradition that is actually derived from Adam."[6] This perspective is not unique to Islam but is common to all of the Abrahamic religions. Discussions of the mythical origins of various nations take on a specifically Islamic, or Arab, hue when the attempts of genealogists to apply concepts of tribal organization universally are considered. Implicit in such attempts is the belief or desire to believe that, while all peoples originate from a common trunk that ramified in different directions, the descendants of Shem occupy a preeminent position.[7] Consequently, the emergence of a tradition among various authors that includes the Byzantines in the same family as the Arabs constitutes quite an acknowledgment on the part of a society that came to see itself as superior to all others.

Nevertheless, the Arab authors were aware that the Byzantine empire, which had never been ethnically homogeneous, was composed of a mixture of peoples. Ibn al-Faqīh states that the inhabitants of *bilād al-Rūm* are mostly *Rūm* and Slavs while, according to al-Mas'ūdī, many *Rūs* (Russians) had joined the *Rūm* as had the Armenians, the Bulgars (who are Slavs), the *Ṣaqāliba,* and the Pecheneg (who are Turks).[8]

Rūm is not the only term employed by Arab Muslim writers to describe the Byzantines, as well as various other related groups and peoples. Also found in the Arabic sources are *'ilj,* a derogatory term very close to the Greek concept of barbaroi,[9] and *Banū al-Aṣfar,* the etymology of which occasioned much discussion among the Arabs. Ibn al-Faqīh offered the following explanation. The king of *Rūm* died leaving no one in the entire Byzantine empire who was fit to rule except a woman. The Byzantines decided, therefore, to take up as ruler the first man to enter their territory through adjacent mountain passes. A runaway Ethiopian slave appeared, and the Byzantines forced him to marry their queen and assume the throne. The couple subsequently had a son who was named *al-Aṣfar,* the yellow one, because he was of mixed race.[10] Thus, not only are the Byzantines of Ibn al-Faqīh's day made out to be the descendants of a black slave, but a randomly chosen runaway slave is deemed more fit to rule the empire than any of its male or female citizens. To the Arabs, for whom the centrality of blood was paramount, a person's nature and worth were closely tied to the worthiness of his or her stock. By denying the Byzantines a line to the past or, more insulting still, by allowing them no more than an inferior past, Ibn al-Faqīh made a statement about their worthiness—and found them wanting. More common in our sources, although less imaginative, is Ibn Qutayba's explanation: the ancestor of the *Rūm* had very yellow skin and thus his descendants came to be called *Banū al-Aṣfar.*[11] Other authors rejected *al-Aṣfar* as designating color or race and saw in it a name: Aṣfar, the grandson of Esau.[12]

BYZANTIUM IN THE QUR'ĀN: *SŪRAT AL-RŪM*

Reference to *al-Rūm* occurs in the Islamic text that is both first in chronology and axial in significance: namely, the Qur'ān. The

Qur'ān is not only Islam's primary source with regard to theological and legal questions; it is also a daily presence in the life of the community of believers. Hence, the importance of the reference to the Byzantines in this Muslim canonical text. The opening verses of *Sūrat al-Rūm* (XXX, 1–5) read as follows:

> Alif Lām Mīm (1) The Greeks have been vanquished (2) in the nearer part of the land; and, after their vanquishing, they shall be victors (3) in a few years. To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice (4) in God's help; God helps whomsoever He will; and He is All-mighty, the All-compassionate (5).

These verses concern the Byzantine-Persian wars, which were fought during the early part of the first/seventh century. At the time of the accession of Emperor Heraclius (A.D. 610–641), the Persians were menacing Byzantium from the east, and, in A.D. 611, they undertook the conquest of Syria, capturing Antioch, the main city of the eastern Byzantine provinces and, later, Damascus. In A.D. 614, Jerusalem was also captured and pillaged. The loss of the holy city deeply shocked the Byzantines, and the effect was compounded by the transport of the relic of the true cross to Ctesiphon. But the Persians' advance did not stop there: between A.D. 617 and 619, they occupied Egypt. Heraclius eventually took the offensive, conducting campaigns against the Persians. In A.D. 627, he finally defeated the Persian army near Nineveh, and the Persian king, Chosroes II, was dethroned and killed. The provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and the true cross were returned to the Byzantine empire. The magnitude of these wars and their significance was not lost on anyone, for they reopened the whole question of frontiers and allegiances in Arabia.[13] The Arabs of the peninsula were caught up in the tensions between the superpowers of the day. The wars, as reflected in the exegetical literature, seem to have led to a division within the Quraysh—the clan of the Prophet Muhammad—separating those who thought that the Persians would win from those who were counting on a Byzantine victory. The

Qur'ānic commentators saw these opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* as *ayāt bayyināt,* a sign that the Qur'ān was God-sent, because of the effective accomplishment of the prophecy contained within them. Many people are said to have converted to Islam as a consequence.[14]

Several Qur'ānic scholars have alluded to the difficulty in reading and interpreting these verses, pointing to their problematic vocalization, which has the potential to change the meaning and the dependent historical explanation.[15] The greatest challenge in reading these verses concerns the forms of the verb *ghalaba* (to vanquish) found within them. The majority of the commentaries read the verb in the second verse in the passive voice, *ghulibat al-Rūm* (the *Rūm* were vanquished), and the verb in the third verse in the active voice, *sa-yaghlibūn* (they will vanquish). There is, however, a strong variant reading that reverses the verb forms: here, the first verb is in the active voice, *ghalabat al-Rūm* (the *Rūm* were victorious), while the second is passive, *sa-yughlabūn* (they will be vanquished). The voweling of the verbs is crucial, as it changes the meaning and interpretation of the verses in a fundamental way.

One of the earliest extant commentaries, that of Mujāhid (d. 104/722), provides the following explanation: "He mentioned the victory of Persia over the *Rūm* and the victory of the *Rūm* over Persia and the rejoicing of the believers for God's assistance of *ahl al-kitāb* [people of the Book] over *ahl al-awthān* [idol worshippers]."[16] Muqātil b.Sulaymān (d. 150/767) states:

> The Persians defeated the *Rūm* in the nearer part of the land . . . and they—meaning the *Rūm*—after their defeat, will be victorious over the Persians in a few years. . . . Persia had defeated the *Rūm,* and the *kuffār* [nonbelievers] of Mecca rejoiced, saying that the Persians, like us, do not have a [holy] book, and they have defeated the *Rūm,* who are people of the Book like you, and so we will defeat you, the way the Persians defeated the *Rūm*. . . . On the day of Badr, the Muslims triumphed over the *kuffār* of Mecca, and [at the same time] the news reached them that the *Rūm* had triumphed over the Persians and the Muslims rejoiced for that.[17]

The Kufan grammarian, Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā (d. 207/822), provides the following similar explanation: "The Persians were victorious over the *Rūm,* and the Muslims were saddened while the Meccan polytheists rejoiced, because the Persians worship idols . . . but the Muslims were inclined toward the *Rūm* because they are [also] people of the Book."[18]

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl al-qurʾān* was "the first major work in the development of traditional Qur'anic sciences,"[19] constituting a standard text on which later commentators drew. Being the earliest complete Qur'ān commentary, it contained "the compilation and material arrangement of the first two centuries and a half of Muslim exegesis."[20] Al-Ṭabarī cites material found in the standard authorities, noting even insignificant variants. He reproduces the exact chains of authorities, hence the repetition, at times, of identical content received through different chains. In his classic interpretation of the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm,* he sums up the various interpretations given earlier and commonly accepted by the early fourth/tenth century. His interpretation is important because later exegetes continued to rely on al-Ṭabarī's text:

> The *qurrā'* [Qur'ān readers] differed as to the reading: the majority of the *qurrā'* of the *amṣār* read it as *ghulibat al-Rūm* . . . in the sense that the Persians defeated the *Rūm.* This has been related on the authority of Ibn 'Umar and Abū Sa'īd.[21] . . . . I heard Ibn 'Umar reading *"Alif Lām Mīm ghalabat al-Rūm,"* and he was asked, "O Abū 'Abdallāh, over what were they victorious?" He said: "Over the countryside of *al-Shām.*" The only correct reading for us is *ghulibat al-Rūm* and no other reading is acceptable, for it enjoys the authoritative consensus of the *qurrā'*. This being the case, the *ta'wīl*[22] of the wording is thus: The Persians defeated the *Rūm* (in the nearer land) from the land of *al-Shām* to that of Persia . . . but the *Rūm* will defeat the Persians subsequent to their earlier defeat (in a few years, for it is God's will) before their victory and after, on either occasion. . . . And on the day the *Rūm* defeat the Persians, the believers will rejoice for God's victory over the polytheists [*mushrikūn*] and for the victory of the *Rūm* over

the Persians. . . . This is the victory of the believers over the polytheists at Badr. . . . On the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, who said: "The Muslims favored a victory by the *Rūm* because they are people of the Book, whilst the polytheists [of Mecca] favored the victory of the Persians, because they are idol worshippers. They mentioned this to Abū Bakr, who, in turn, repeated it to the Prophet, who said, 'They will be defeated.' Abū Bakr reiterated these words to the polytheists who responded: 'Let us have a deadline; if you win, you will have so-and-so and if we do, we will get so-and-so.' They decided on five years, which passed, and still the Persians were not defeated. Abū Bakr mentioned this fact to the Prophet who told him, 'Make the deadline ten years. . . .' And so the *Rūm* were defeated and were later victorious. . . ." Sufyān said: "I heard that they won on the same day as the battle of Badr." . . . On the authority of ʿIkrima: "The *Rūm* and the Persians met in battle in the nearer part of the land; it was said that the nearer part of the land was Adhriʿāt, where the *Rūm* were defeated. When the news reached the Prophet and the Companions in Mecca, it troubled them, for the Prophet hated the victory of the ignorant [*ummiyūn*][23] Mazdeans [*Majūs*] over the Byzantine people of the Book. The nonbelievers of Mecca rejoiced and, meeting the Companions of the Prophet, said, 'You are people of a Book and so are the Christians, while we are *ummiyūn*. Our brothers, the Persians, defeated your brothers and, if you are to battle us, we will defeat you. . . .' And so, God sent down these verses. . . . Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq went to the nonbelievers, and said, 'Are you rejoicing for the victory of your brothers over our brothers? Do not . . . for, by God, the *Rūm* will defeat the Persians, so have we been told by our prophet.'" . . . On the authority Qatāda: "When God sent down these verses, the Muslims believed their God. . . . And God made the *Rūm* victorious over the Persians on the day of Ḥudaybiyya. The Muslims rejoiced, [both] for their treaty and for the victory of *ahl al-kitāb* over the *Majūs*." . . . As for those who read *ghalabat al-Rūm*. . . . On the authority of Abū Saʿīd: "On the day of the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, the believers were pleased, so the verse was sent down. . . . On the day of Badr, the *Rūm* were victorious over the Persians, so the Muslims rejoiced, and God sent these verses. . . . As for the reading, *sa-yughlabūn*, the meaning is thus: following their victory over Persia, they will be defeated by the Muslims, in order for the interpretation to be correct."[24]

As may be seen, al-Ṭabarī lists various traditions when he explains the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*. The majority of these traditions, which rely on different chains of authorities, repeat practically the same content. This is because all of them may ultimately be traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), who has been acclaimed as the "most venerable exponent" of *tafsīr*,[25] his client, ʿIkrimah (d. 105/723), from the school of Mecca; and Qatāda (d. 118/736), from the Iraqi school of Ibn Masʿūd. Thus, the traditional reading—by far the most prevalent in commentaries both antecedent and subsequent to al-Ṭabarī—places the vowel *u* over the letter *ghain*, rendering it *ghulibat*, in the passive voice. The second verb is in the active voice: *sa-yaghlibūn*. The basic explanation is provided in al-Ṭabarī, who reiterates earlier commentaries, and is repeated in most other commentaries:[26] the *Rūm* were defeated by the Persians but will soon triumph over them, and on that day, the day when the people of the Book defeat the pagan Persians, the believers will rejoice. In the commentaries, the believers are taken to be the followers of the Prophet—in other words, the Muslims. This reading reflects an approving view of the Byzantines since the expectation is that a later Byzantine victory will give the Muslims reason to rejoice. The early commentaries are all unanimous in their interpretation of these verses and, thus, in this favorable perspective toward Byzantium.

The commentaries adhering to this traditional reading and interpretation explain the believers' joy at a Byzantine victory in religious terms: the "believers shall rejoice" because the victory signifies the triumph of the Book over polytheism. This explanation is also found in the major work on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), that of ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Naysabūrī (d. 468/1075).[27] Thus, the Byzantines' monotheism is the determining factor behind the Muslims' favor.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar and Abū

Sa'īd, a variant reading that has the potential of drastically changing the meaning of these verses. This reading vocalizes *ghalaba* as *ghalabat al-Rūm . . . sa-yughlabūn,* which means that the Byzantines defeated the Persians but will later be defeated by the Muslims, the real cause for Muslim joy. Al-Ṭabarī, however, gives his own judgment about the validity and probability of all these interpretations. As noted above, he states his opinion clearly and categorically: "The only correct reading for us is *ghulibat al-Rūm,* and no other reading is acceptable." The variant reading of these verses represents what Andrew Rippin describes as "a conscious attempt to come to grips with an obscure passage by alternative grammatical constructions and lexical variations."[28] Thus, variant readings are intended to support differing interpretations. The alternative reading of these verses seeks to explain them by denying Byzantium's triumph and emphasizing, instead, an eventual Muslim victory. This variant interpretation, with its negative undertones regarding the Byzantines, developed later and reflects growing animosity between Byzantium and Islam. But until the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh century, the exegetical tradition portrayed the *Rūm* as monotheists who would ultimately vanquish the polytheists. The Byzantines and the Muslims were clearly on the same side, and the Muslims would rejoice at a future Byzantine victory over the pagan Persians. Thus, the central religious, or axial text of Islam—namely, the Qur'ān—or, rather, the exegetical tradition attached to it adopted a position that saw the Byzantines as political and ideological allies. Upholding monotheism and its practitioners was indeed crucial at the earliest stage for the Islamic *umma.*

The variant reading of the Qur'anic verses of the *sūra (ghalabat . . . sa-yughlabūn),* which may be mainly traced to Ibn 'Umar, promises that the Muslims will ultimately defeat the Byzantines. In the course of the eleventh century, this variant line of exegetical interpretation, which denied any previous ideological affiliation between Islam and Byzantium, predominated. For example, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), the great Mu'tazilite theologian, explains the Qur'anic verse ("and on that day the believers shall rejoice") in light of contemporaneous events. Rejecting the notion that the first/seventh-century Muslims had any reason to celebrate a Byzantine victory over Persia due to a shared monotheism, he writes: "Why is it that the believers shall rejoice at the victory of one group of polytheists over another . . . ? The answer is that God will bring victory to the believers by bringing about the humiliation of one group of polytheists by another such group."[29]

In *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl,* the most important Mu'tazilī *tafsīr,* al-Zamakhsharī (d. 528/1144) also departs from the traditional reading by reversing the forms of the verbs. His interpretation is that the *Rūm* were victorious and that they, in turn, will be defeated by the Muslims after only a few years. Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) includes the variant reading of Ibn 'Umar and similarly explains that, after a certain period, the Muslims will triumph over the *Rūm.* Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), who relies on al-Zamakhsharī, also includes the variant reading in his famous commentary, writing: "It has been read *ghalabat . . . sa-yughlabūn* to mean that the *Rūm* were victorious over the countryside of *al-Shām* and the Muslims will vanquish them. In the ninth year . . . the Muslims invaded and conquered some of their lands." He includes this variant, alongside the traditional interpretation, without any further discussion as to its veracity. It is as if the two interpretations, the traditional and the radical, have equal weight.[30]

From the fifth/eleventh to the seventh/thirteenth centuries, commentators adopted the new exegetical emphasis in an attempt to circumvent the jubilation of the believers. Al-Zamakhsharī proposes that the continuous warfare between the Byzantines and the Persians would weaken them, while strengthening Islam; hence, the joy of the believers. The Sufi 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) adheres to the traditional reading but hastens to qualify his assessment by saying that "the Muslims rejoiced for the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, even though unbelief unites them." Nonetheless, the

Rūm are somewhat superior, since they have singled out a number of prophets for their devotion. For al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), the believers' joy could merely be the consequence of a natural Muslim preference for the victory of a weaker enemy over one that is more threatening. For al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), their joy is uniquely connected to the Muslim victory over the polytheists at Badr.[31]

This new line of explanation reflects the emergence of two cardinal differences in relation to earlier thought. First, the Byzantines are now characterized as polytheists despite their initial and traditional depiction as monotheists. Second, the jubilation of the believers no longer stems from a foreknowledge of Byzantine victory. In commentaries dating from the sixth/twelfth century onward, the "rejoicing" is explained by a combination of reasons: because the polytheists (that is, the Persians and the Byzantines) were battling one another; because the Muslims were victorious over their enemies; because the Byzantine victory coincided with a Muslim victory; or because the victory, predicted by the Prophet, testified to his truthfulness. Some of these points appear on Abū Ḥayyān's list of explanations for the joy of the believers, which includes the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, the victory of the Muslims over their enemies, the victory as evidence for the Prophet's veracity, and the likelihood that the two oppressors would annihilate each other. Muḥammad al-Naysābūrī (d. 550/1155) gives the following reasons for the believers' jubilation: first, the victory confirms the Prophet's promise; second, the weakness of Persia strengthens the Arabs; third, the Persians are not *ahl al-kitāb*, whereas the *Rūm* are Christians and have a gospel; and finally, al-Bayḍāwī explains the "rejoicing" in terms of the victory of monotheists over polytheists, the confirmation of Muslim truthfulness and as a device to strengthen Muslims belief in their religion.[32]

These lists clearly represent attempts to depreciate the traditional explanation of the believers' joy, an explanation that tended to emphasize the shared monotheism of the Muslims and the Byzantines. At this point in time, a rationale that had once gone virtually unchallenged is now only one reason among many. A change in emphasis has taken place whereby even the other reasons given completely ignore the ties that bind Islam and Byzantium in favor of explanations that focus exclusively on Islam. In particular, the connection between the believers' joy and the fulfillment of the Prophet's prediction is given added credence.

It is obvious that Qur'anic exegetes adopted interpretations negative to Byzantium as the empire became increasingly involved in an adversarial relationship with the Islamic state. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān, and others provide more elaborate and contorted explanations to obscure the early complimentary image of Byzantium in the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*. The prominence that the variant reading came to achieve in the rational commentaries *(tafsīr bi al-ra'ī)* must be linked to the new defensive position taken by the Muslims during the fourth/tenth and fifth/ eleventh centuries when the Muslim community was divided and weak.

It is true, however, that the variant reading is never standing on its own, as the traditionally more accepted reading is always juxtaposed side by side with it. Working as they were within a tradition, the commentators reiterated the traditional reading and interpretation. Indeed, even though the individual scholar could support or emphasize a particular interpretation as a result of the historical circumstances of his time or simply personal inclination reflecting the prevalent dominant ideology, he, nevertheless, was in a continuous dialogue with the tradition. Because of this entrenched tradition, the exegetical literature took centuries to turn the Byzantines into an enemy. In other Arabic literary genres, the notion of the Byzantines as a main rival emerged earlier. In any event, the earlier exegetical traditions depict the Byzantines as monotheists and, by extension, as political allies. Upholding monotheism and its practitioners was crucial, at this early stage, for the Islamic *umma*.

EARLY CONTACTS: BYZANTINE MILITARY LEADERS

Military encounters against the Byzantines heightened the Arabs' consciousness of ethnic unity and brought them face to face with a formidable enemy. These encounters and the hope of defeating the Byzantines were the subject of Umayyad poetry, such as the following verse by the poet Jarīr in praise of the Umayyad prince Mu'āwiya b. Hishām:

> On the day when his victory brought the necks of the *Rūm* under
> his yoke,
> Glad tidings to all who live in lowlands and highlands.[33]

In spite of an increased sense of separation, the Arabs' special affinity with the Byzantines are reflected in the verse of one tribal poet:

> Though you hate us, yet the *Rūm* are your ancestors;
> And the *Rūm* bear no hatred toward the Arabs.[34]

One Muslim tradition promised Muḥammad's followers the conquest of Syria, stating: "I have been given the keys of Syria." However, an awareness of the primary obstacle—Byzantine strength—is reflected in a number of traditions, such as the one attributed to a Companion of the Prophet, in which he asks: "But how can we possibly gain Syria while it has the 'horned' Byzantines well established in it?" One contemporary is supposed to have said: "Does Muḥammad think that fighting the *Banū al-Aṣfar* is child play?"[35] But the Muslims' rapid conquest of Syria proved the traditions to be correct and brought the conquerors face to face with Byzantium's leaders.

Byzantine behavior in Syria was the subject of sharp criticism in the Muslim texts, which contain specific accusations of wrongdoing. The word most often used in such discussions is *ẓulm,* which, as used in the *Qur'ān,* may be broadly defined as "misdeed." Later, its usage becomes increasingly specialized as it takes on a stronger connotation of injustice and oppression. According to most of the early Arabic dictionaries, it means "putting a thing in a place not its own"—hence, "acting in whatsoever way one pleases in the disposing of the property of another" and also "transgressing the proper limit."[36] The Byzantine government in Syria was an "oppressor" in the sense that it transgressed the proper limits, took the property of its subjects, and thus harmed them. Another synonym for *ẓulm* is *ṭughyān* (tyranny), which is derived from the same root as *ṭāghiya,* one of the terms used to refer to the Byzantine emperors. The opposite of *ẓulm* is *'adl* (justice), and both terms are used in the broadest possible sense to include moral and religious values. Islamic concepts of government required that the deeds and actions of the rulers comply with the utterances, commands, prohibitions, and injunctions of the Prophet. The most laudable attribute that a ruler could possess was equity, and his primary function was the administration of justice under the guidance of the Qur'ān and *sunna.*[37]

Justice, as a political and social ideal, retained a prominent place in Islamic theories of political organization. The focus on it in the Qur'ān reflects a deep-seated conviction that justice is the natural and necessary basis of all human society.[38] A proper appreciation of this point is essential before approaching criticisms, by Muslim authors, of many aspects of the administration of justice under Byzantine rule. Invariably, the Byzantine administration in Syria is depicted as having degenerated into an unjust and tyrannical mechanism, and Byzantine practice is made to stand in sharp contrast to Muslim conduct and principles.

Thus, the *ẓulm* of the Byzantine government in Syria provides a foil for the righteousness of the new community. Indeed, the inhabitants of Fiḥl bluntly say as much to the Muslims: "You are more preferable to us than the Byzantines, even though they are Christians, for you keep your word and you are more just and better governors." The defeated Byzantine armies leaving Fiḥl confirm this assessment; they say that, unlike the Muslims, they are guilty of deception and intolerance. Moreover, "we drink wine and commit unlawful deeds [*ḥarām*], we revoke our oaths and we act unjustly."[39] The Byzantine defeat is partially explained by means of a populist view that saw the Arabs as the instrument of God's punishment. Sinfulness provides the abstract theological explanation for the Byzantine debacle.

Criticisms of the corrupt Byzantine élite prepared the way for its replacement by a new self-righteous religious élite. The Muslim sources include a whole collection of *topoi* intended to stress the piety of the Muslim protagonists in contrast to their Byzantine predecessors.[40] One such passage is found in Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī and in al-Ṭabarī:

> Yes, they [the Muslims] are monks during the night and abstainers during the day; if their king steals, they have his hand cut off and, if anyone commits adultery, he is stoned. . . . The great patrician answered: "If I did not fear the anger of the great king, I would ask them for peace so that I may be saved and enter their religion.[41]

As the Muslim authors assessed and judged the basic conceptual differences between two political ideologies—namely, the early Muslim caliphate and Byzantine kingship—their disapprobation was not limited to specific acts of injustice. Instead, they extended their comparison to include the men—the Muslim caliphs and the Byzantine emperors—as well as their offices, always to the detriment of Byzantium. Mu'ādh b. Jabal was critical of the hierarchical organization of the Byzantine power structure and also of the elaborate ceremonial that distanced the rulers from the population. He emphasized that a sense of justice was a prerequisite for legitimate rule, while its absence disqualified any ruler. Mu'ādh told the Byzantines:

> If your king is Heraclius, our king is God . . . and our *amīr* is one among us whom we confirm only if he rules according to our Book and to the *sunna* of our prophet, peace be on him. Otherwise, we remove him. If he [the *amīr*] steals, his hand is cut; if he commits adultery, he is flogged; and if he curses a commoner, the commoner can curse him back. . . . He is not removed from us, does not treat us haughtily and is just.[42]

Mu'ādh was criticizing the Byzantine emperors and governors for their temporal perspective, their distance from their subjects, their arrogance, and their injustice. Byzantine rule, in his opinion, was inferior to Islamic rule, which tended strongly toward egalitarianism in the earliest period. Unlike the Byzantine emperor, the caliph was supposed to be approached as a simple mortal, equal in all ways to any other Muslim. The Muslim commander, Khālid b. al-Walīd (d. 21/642), told the Byzantine commander, Vahan: "Thank God, who made our prince a man like us, so that if he claims that he is our *malik* [king] we remove him, and we do not see him as having greater merit than any Muslim." While identifying and condemning the reprehensible qualities of Byzantine leaders, the authors of our texts also indicate Muslim attitudes toward justice and government. Thus, the criticisms inherent in these texts may be recognized as exemplifying the early Muslims' leveling tendencies. The Muslims' notion of justice as a crucial element in the assurance of stable rule placed the unjust and corrupt Byzantine leaders in a category quite distanced from their Muslim counterpart. Later Islamic political ideology would witness the creation of the myth of the early Muslim caliphate as the golden age of Islam, with strong emphasis on the concept of *'adāla* (justice) as the golden mean.[43]

The texts supply specific accusations concerning Byzantine behavior in Syria that remind us of the words of the Byzantine soldiers retreating from Fiḥl. Al-Azdī, who was the source for that account, elsewhere describes the disorderliness of the Byzantine soldiers, who mistreated Syrian civilians and despoiled their property. The Christian inhabitants accused them of slaughtering their sheep and of robbing them, while their superior officers neglected their duty and instead drank wine and committed adultery. Such accounts emphasize the greed and outward cruelty of the powerful Byzantines, whose misdeeds were seemingly left unpunished.

A particular case, reported by al-Azdī, involves one of the Byzantine generals, who confiscated sheep belonging to a local Christian and distributed the rest to his companions. The owner sent his wife and daughter to complain to the commander about the behavior of his men. However, instead of correcting the injustice, the women were raped, the son killed when he tried to interfere, and the father had his hand cut off. This sequence of tyrannical actions perpetrated by Byzantine officers in Syria warranted the almost desperate reaction of Vahan, the general commander of the Byzantine armies in Syria. Vahan was said to have been shocked by the comportment of the Byzantine generals, declaring himself innocent of their crimes. Unable to dispense justice because all of his commanders supported such transgressions, he exclaimed "in his tongue":

> How strange and odd! Why do the mountains not collapse, why does the sea not burst out, why does the land not vanish and why does the sky not shudder at this sin which you have perpetrated? . . . As for me, I swear that I am innocent of your deeds.[44]

The Arab authors make a clear distinction between the noble and righteous conduct of Vahan and that of the other Byzantine military leaders, at once ruthless and unjust. Vahan is depicted as an honest man horrified at the actions of his officers; he warns them that, if they believe in a God that protects and gives justice to the oppressed, they may be sure of punishment. Distancing himself from such behavior, Vahan declared himself innocent of their crimes.[45] Vahan's exemplary conduct and moral superiority found resonance at a higher level of the Byzantine hierarchy. In a letter to Vahan, the emperor Heraclius declared that the Muslim victory was due to the shameful deeds and injustice that had taken place under Byzantine rule. Ibn Aʿtham relates the instructions that Heraclius supposedly gave to General Vahan to govern his future behavior:

> You should be just and compassionate toward your kinsmen. . . . Honor the eminent, yet do not disdain the common people. You should be like a father and a brother to all of them. You have seen that the Arabs were victorious because they accept God's commandments and consult the wise among them. I entrust you with what no king has ever enjoined, so beware of disobeying me and beware of following the whims of your soul, for this would be the greatest of catastrophes.[46]

This plea for compassion and justice is manifestly self-serving, highlighting as it does the contrast between the unjust behavior of the Byzantines and the rectitude of the Muslims, who accepted the commandments and consulted their sages.[47] It is also consequential because Heraclius is clearly not implicated in the injustice committed by the Byzantines. He is detached from his unworthy and treacherous following as he criticizes the defects of his own regime. The instructions attributed to him place him at a higher level as a conscientious leader enjoining his generals to rule with vigilance and justice. These references to the emperor are neither unique nor fortuitous, for Heraclius enjoyed a position of unparalleled favor in the Arabic-Islamic sources.

AN EXEMPLARY RULER: EMPEROR HERACLIUS

The corpus of Islamic lore on Heraclius is considerable. Heraclius's importance for the Muslims stemmed from the fact that he was contemporaneous with the Prophet Muḥammad and was the leader of the reconsolidated Byzantine empire during the first wave of Islamic conquests.[48] He had ascended the throne following the revolt against Emperor Phocas (r. 602–610), while the Persians were menacing the empire from the east. Al-Ṭabarī relates the story of Heraclius's accession to power and his subsequent triumph over the Persians in this way:

> The *Rūm* killed Emperor Phocas because of what they saw of his immorality, his insolence toward God, and his bad administration. They replaced him with a man named Heraclius, who, seeing the extent of the destruction afflicted by the Persian soldiers and the number of prisoners and the booty they took, . . . cried and

rator whether it was permissible for a *ḥājj* (one who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca) to establish himself among the *Ifranj* (here meaning Christians), the merchant answers:

> "My brother, if I were to tell you about this city, you would understand better, and you would realize that those who inhabit it have nothing to fear. They can do whatever they please and, at the same time, make a considerable profit." Asked to describe it, he says: "It is a great city on the seashore, comparable to Alexandria, and it takes one morning to cross it from end to end. There is a place as large as two-thirds of Damascus, surrounded by walls with a gate, which is reserved exclusively for the occupation of the Muslims. There is equally a similar place for the Jews. . . . There are one hundred thousand churches, less one. . . . When I asked, I was told that the ruler of Constantinople has an equal number of kings at his service, each with his own church. He completed the number by building the great church. . . . It is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings that can be seen."[45]

ʿAbdallāh lived in Constantinople after the Byzantine restoration in A.D. 1261, when the city had regained some of its earlier opulence. His extended stay in the city afforded him the time and the opportunity to experience it as a reality. ʿAbdallāh describes a wealthy, robust, and powerful Constantinople that is pervaded by a plethora of monuments and churches and is once again an economic powerhouse. Nothing in his description accuses or condemns: on the contrary, he gives evidence of the pride of one who has lived in a great city. ʿAbdallāh, like all our authors, has only praise for Constantinople. Indeed, in spite of the catastrophes that befell the Byzantine capital in the late sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, it remains a model of affluence and material magnificence in our texts.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Riḥla* reflects the long evolution that had altered the landscape of the city. He notes the strong presence of the Latin element and states that the city is divided into two areas. The Latin quarter is called al-Ghalaṭa:

> It is reserved for the Christian Franks, who dwell there. They are of different origins: Genoese, Venetians, and the people of Rome and France. They are all men of commerce, and their port is one of the greatest ports. . . . Its bazaars are good but overlaid with filth.[46]

The other half of the city is called Istanbul, and it

> includes the places of residence of the sultan [emperor], the functionaries of the state, and the population. Its bazaars and streets are spacious and paved with flagstones, . . . and the practitioners of each craft have a separate space. . . . The majority of the artisans and retailers are women.[47]

In discussing the westernized portion of the city, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa emphasizes the presence of the Italian merchants and the importance of their economic role. Galata, granted to the Genoese by Michael VIII, became extremely prosperous due to its role in international trade. Al-ʿUmarī, through a conversation with a Genoese merchant, stresses the cosmopolitan nature of the Byzantine capital: merchants from all regions can exercise commerce freely.[48] At the same time, the involvement of Constantinople's eastern population in commerce and craftsmanship was also significant, as was the relatively large number of women engaged in such activities in it.

Following its capture by the Crusaders in A.D. 1204, Constantinople never regained its large population, and it could no longer claim to be the greatest city on the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it continued to have a disproportionate significance for both Byzantines and Arabs. The later Arabic-Islamic sources inevitably include a few major Constantinopolitan monuments that served as archetypal symbols of the city whether or not they were actually visited by the authors. The texts list these same specific monuments with very similar descriptions and include the same types of comments—perhaps unsurprisingly, since the authors copied one another's descriptions. The list, which constituted a "medieval tourist paradigm,"[49] included Hagia

Sophia, the Golden Gate, the Column of Justinian, the Column of Theodosius, the Horlogium, and the Bronze Horses. Hagia Sophia, absent from the earlier description of Constantinople by Hārūn b. Yahyā, takes a place of prominence in these later sources. According to al-Harawī, "the great church is Hagia Sophia."[50] Al-Dimashqī describes "the Great Church, where it is said that an angel resides" and where lies "a colossal high altar with huge doors and columns."[51] Al-Jazarī also includes a description of Hagia Sophia provided by the merchant ʿAbdallāh:

> The church is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings to be seen. The place in which they stand for praying is surrounded by grills. . . . On the walls of this church are represented all of the cities of the world and all of the skills. When one of them wants to chose a skill for his son, he takes him to the walls and shows him the skills.[52]

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa similarly focuses on Hagia Sophia as the central monument of the city:

> I will describe its exterior having not seen its interior. It was built by . . . the cousin of [Prophet] Solomon. . . . It is one of the greatest churches of the *Rūm*. It is surrounded by walls, as if it were a city. Its gates are thirteen in number, and it has a sacred enclosure. No one is prevented from entering the enclosure. . . . It is like an audience hall paved with marble and traversed by a water stream . . . that flows between two walls constructed of marble, inlaid with pieces of different colors and cut with the most skillful art.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also mentions the wealth of the church, with particular reference to the golden frame of the cross and the main door, which was covered in plaques of silver and gold.[53]

Ibn Jubayr, al-Qazwīnī, Yāqūt, and al-Jazarī all provide lengthy descriptions of the column of Justinian, which are essentially the same. Ibn Jubayr states that the equestrian statue of Justinian sits on top of a bronze column. The emperor has his right hand raised and his palm open, as if pointing toward the realm of Islam. In his left hand, he holds a globe: "Opinions vary concerning this monument. Some think that the globe is a talisman with the power to inhibit the enemy from invading their country; others say that the globe holds an inscription that says: 'I have possessed the world, and I held it in my hand like this globe; I left it without taking anything.'" Al-Harawī similarly talks about the talismanic nature of the statue: "In his hand is a talisman that prevents the enemy from invading the country."[54] Al-Harawī includes a description of the Column of Theodosius in his work: "There is a white marbled column in the market . . . entirely covered with three-dimensional sculptures of admirable workmanship." It is surrounded by a grill that includes a talisman, and if one climbs to the top of it, he can see the city in its entirety: "In my *Kitāb al-ʿajāʾib,* I will . . . talk about the veneration the inhabitants of this land profess for it and for the figures that cover it." Here, although al-Harawī mentions the talismanic element of this column, he does not explain what kind of power it was reputed to have.[55]

Al-Qazwīnī gives some details of the Horlogion, the clock that so impressed the Arab authors: "In the lighthouse of Constantinople there is a Horlogium, which is made up of twelve doors, each representing an hour. At every hour, one of the doors opens, and a statue comes out. . . . The Byzantines say that it is the work of the wise Bīnās (Apollonius)." Al-Qazwīnī also attributes to Apollonius the creation of the three bronze horses, a talisman located at the gate of the imperial palace to prevent the horses of the city from making unnecessary noise or neighing. Thus, the assumption that a significant number of the monuments and statues in Constantinople were endowed with talismanic or magical powers continued unabated and even increased in the later texts. Describing the palace of Constantinople as one of the wonders of the world, al-Qalqashandī talks about walking into it between "two lanes of hollow beautiful [bronze statues representing] human beings, horses, and lions. . . . In the palace there is a large variety of astounding automatons [*ʿajāʾib al-maṣnūʿāt*]."[56]

As for the hippodrome, it is now mentioned by al-Idrīsī not as a *maydān* [race course] but as a *malʿab* (circus). While the races had been at the center of the testimony of Hārūn b. Yaḥyā, they disappear from the later texts. Al-Harawī and al-Qazwīnī fail to mention the races limiting their descriptions to one or two columns. The Arab authors seem to have progressively abandoned all historical considerations with regard to the hippodrome, making the symbolic significance of the place prevail.[57]

In addition to all these typically Byzantine monuments, the geographers and travelers of the later period mention the Islamic monuments of the city. They reproduce the legend of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, the Companion of the Prophet, who participated in the expedition against Constantinople in the year 48–49/668–669. Both Ibn al-Athīr and al-Dimashqī mention the tomb of Abū Ayyūb. Al-Qazwīnī describes this tomb as being by the walls of Constantinople and says that its soil is venerated by the Byzantines, who go there to pray for rain during times of drought.[58]

The second important Islamic monument mentioned in our sources is the mosque connected with the name of Maslama, the leader of the Muslims' greatest expedition against Constantinople in 97–99/715–717. The mosque is discussed in conjunction with the restoration of Constantinople to the Byzantines in 660/1261. Ibn Jubayr states that the Byzantine emperor rebuilt Maslama's mosque in 455/1263. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692/1291) adds that the Byzantine emperor had come on Maslama's mosque while touring the city with Mamluk Egypt's envoy. At one time, Saladin had asked permission to reconstruct the mosque, but the Byzantines had refused him. According to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, God had postponed the performance of this blessed duty, leaving it to serve as a reward for al-Ẓāhir Baybars (658–676/1260–1277) and a glory for his state. When the Sultan heard of this, "he was pleased at the mercy of God, . . . who had prepared this reward during this period and caused the prayer of Islam to be established in the country of the infidels."[59] Thus, as late as the late seventh/thirteenth century—and despite the recent destruction of the city by the Latins—Constantinople's symbolic importance had not diminished. Rebuilding this mosque in Constantinople brought glory and prestige to the Muslim ruler and symbolized the extent of his power and influence.

A few sources refer to two other Muslim tombs in Constantinople. Both al-Dimashqī and al-Harawī mention a tomb built for a descendant of al-Ḥusayn, son of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, while al-Zuhrī mentions the tomb of Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāḥ, a Companion of the Prophet who played a pivotal role in the early history of Islam and who is counted among *al-ʿashara al-mubashshara* (the ten believers), to whom paradise was promised. Al-Zuhrī states that Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāḥ died during Maslama's expedition and was buried near the walls of Constantinople and that the *Rūm* still light candles at his grave. Although al-Zuhrī may be confusing the tombs of Abū Ayyūb and Abū ʿUbayda, the fact that such prominent and revered personalities are named in the same breath as Constantinople is a testimony to the high esteem and quasi-veneration in which our sources held the Byzantine capital. The presence of Islamic monuments in Constantinople was important in that they provided a symbolic possession of the city. The existence of Islamic monuments linked to major figures of Islamic mythology both Islamized and sacralized the Byzantine capital, providing Constantinople with some semblance of a Muslim genealogy.[60] In fact, the presence of these graves within the walls of the city permitted the inclusion of Constantinople in pilgrimage itineraries like the one compiled by al-Harawī.

The Arab Muslim authors concentrated on the marvels of the city and on its Islamic monuments: talking about Constantinople meant talking about a small number of monuments that represented the entire city. They appreciated its diversity and opulence, the many marvels imputed with occult powers and, of course, those monuments invested with Muslim religious significance. In these later descriptions, the city remained harmonious, rational, and orderly, and the fascination of the Arab writers with it was unaffected by the city's various mutations, which sealed its decline. The authors do not talk about a dilapidated, shabby Constantinople; in their imaginations, the city had survived all of its catastrophes intact.

The idea of Constantinople and the fascination it inspired remained the focus of the Arab-Muslim literary tradition on Byzantium. Indeed, the vast majority of references to the empire contained in the later sources are largely references to its capital. This had become a virtual necessity with the gradual but considerable territorial losses incurred by the Byzantines; by the eighth/fourteenth century, the empire had been reduced to Constantinople. Al-Qalqashandī points that "only Constantinople and its surrounding territories still lie in the hands of the Byzantine emperors. The Franks have seized its western territories, while the Muslims have taken possession of the territory east of the Gulf and many districts on the western side of the Gulf."[61] For centuries, Constantinople had been the center and symbol of the mighty Byzantine empire; in the end, it became the empire.

The most surprising characteristic of our authors' descriptions of the Byzantine capital is the absence of deprecatory comments and criticism, starting with Hārūn's impartiality and ending with Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's perplexed wonder. Constantinople remained a great city, wealthy and full of wonders. Indeed, the chronological gap between the early and later writers is revealing: there is a definite continuity in the image of Constantinople, an image untarnished by the various catastrophes to which the city eventually succumbed. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's bedazzlement obscured the fact that the great city had been repeatedly plundered and ravaged and that it had suffered the effects of the empire's general decline. Yet this is the image of Constantinople with which we are left: a stereotype based on old depictions, references, and *topoi*, particularly reflected in the description of those monuments that came to signify the city. The Arab image, spanning centuries, seems an anachronistic exaltation of the city that it once was.

From the earliest days of Islam, geographers and travelers gave detailed and laudatory descriptions of the Byzantine capital, causing the city and its mystique to find a permanent place in a wide variety of literary genres, including Muslim apocalyptic literature. Irrespective of the level of access to "real" information, the Byzantine capital continued to play a role in the Arab Muslim unconscious. The fascination with the city persisted until its fall in 1453. The texts persevered in performing the ambivalence felt toward the Byzantine metropolis, the mixture of attraction and aversion, admiration and desire for appropriation. Even during its decline, Arab Muslim authors wrote about it with great enthusiasm, for Constantinople was, as it were, an entire world.

THE FALL

The eighth/fourteenth century was for Byzantium a period of political disaster. The fragmentation of the empire brought about by the fourth Crusade, the commercial and naval concessions conferred on Venice and Genoa, the destruction caused by the Catalan company, the increasing penetration and consolidation of the Turks in Anatolia, and a series of civil wars and plagues left the empire diminished, underpopulated, and impoverished. The weakness of the Byzantine empire contrasted with the vigorous organization of the Ottoman empire whose territory, by the end of the eighth/fourteenth century, covered the greater part of Asia Minor and the Balkan peninsula.

The gradual decline of the Byzantine empire was observed and remarked on by a number of Arab historians and geographers. In Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's list of the seven kings who are "the great and mighty of this world," he mentions the rulers of Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Uzbak, Turkistān, India, and China.[62] The Byzantine emperor, who had consistently featured in earlier such lists, was, at last, omitted. Writing in the eighth/fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn reformulated his sense of the Byzantine empire in light of his times. He was clearly aware that the Byzantine empire had systematically lost ground to the Ottomans, who had almost completed the conquest of Asia Minor and had, in addition, conquered and settled in the Balkans. Ibn Khaldūn states that east of the straits of Constantinople is located the realm of Ibn ʿUthmān with its chief city in Bursa. He pointed out that this region used to belong to the Byzantines. Ibn ʿUthmān now "exerts authority over the ruler of Constantinople and is master of the domains from all sides."[63]

The capture of Constantinople was not a strategic necessity for the Ottomans, since they had managed to rule their adjacent possessions without much interference. Nevertheless, Constantinople's continued existence as practically a city-state, stood in the way of the territorial unity of the Ottoman domains. Much like other Muslim rulers before him, the Ottoman sultan, Mehmet the Conqueror, was conscious of the political, religious, and commercial significance of the city. But its greatest value was as a symbol, for it simultaneously provoked the envy and the awe of enemies. Mehmet did have enemies: he was locked in a power struggle with rivals from the Turkish nobility. He chose to fortify his position by embarking on a great military victory, and in the words of Stanford Shaw, "nothing could be more spectacular than the conquest of Constantinople."[64]

The conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet on 29 May 1453 shocked the Christian world. The great historic Christian city had passed into the hands of the infidels. This event was widely reported at the time and lamented for many years afterward. Pope Nicholas issued a bull to all the princes of the west preaching a Crusade. Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy, presided at a banquet where all the company swore to go to holy war. The Oath of the Pheasant, as it was called, was never fulfilled. Thus, although the princes hastened to collect reports on the fall of the city, and writers wrote horrified laments, there was no Crusade.[65]

Following their initial shock and despair, the Byzantines turned to lamentation, as they recalled their fallen city. Constantinople and, more specifically, the Hagia Sophia came to symbolize a grandeur and glory forever lost. First interpreted in prophetic terms, the conquest gradually entered the realm of myth and legend. The illiterate masses developed a folklore that attempted to explain the alteration of their world and promised themselves, through prophetic pronouncements, that the Greeks would eventually rise again to defeat the Turks and reinstate their empire.[66] An eighteenth-century Arab-Christian manuscript from Aleppo bears witness to the enduring reverberation that the fall of the Byzantine capital and the dream of reconquest were to have.[67]

Sultan Mehmet's success, where so many others had failed, represented the culmination of centuries of Muslim effort, the realization of one of the most cherished and enduring aims of medieval Islam and the actualization of prophecies found in Islamic eschatological texts. Speculation about the last day, the appearance of the *dajjāl*, and the role of the *mahdī* had continued to appear in the texts, often intermingled with ruminations on the future conquest of Constantinople. Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* embodies the apocalyptic traditions portending the cataclysmic end of time, including the inevitable acquisition of the Byzantine capital. He mentions "the *mahdī*, who will lead people in the midprayer, renew Islam, and cause justice to triumph. He will conquer the Andalusian peninsula, will reach and take Rome, and will march onward toward the Orient and subjugate it. He will master Constantinople, and the government of the whole world will be his."[68]

Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1469) recounts Cairo's reaction to the news of the city's conquest. A delegation sent by Mehmet II arrived to congratulate Sultan Ināl on his accession and to announce the fall of Constantinople at the hands of Mehmet II:

> He conquered the city of Istanbul by force and took possession of it after a mighty confrontation on Tuesday, 20 Jumāda, in the year 857. They had laid siege to it on 26 Rabīʿ I. . . . The envoy arrived with two captives belonging to the Constantinopolitan élite and traveled with the captives through Cairo, which was decorated. The Sultan was delighted at the great conquest, along with everyone else. The good tidings were proclaimed and Cairo was deco-

> rated for days. . . . In short, the arrival of this ambassador with such fine news was a great event.[69]

Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 930/1524) similarly highlights the fall of Constantinople: "The conquest was on 20 Jumāda al-Awwal, of this year. When the news reached the sultan [of Egypt], the good tidings were proclaimed, and Cairo was decorated. Then the sultan appointed an ambassador to the son of ʿUthmān to congratulate him for this greatest of conquests."[70] These contemporary texts exult in the conquest of Constantinople but allot very little space in announcing it. Moreover, the authors do not halt to analyze or reflect on their own rejoicing and on the historical significance of the event. Clearly, the event was momentous but only in an imaginary way. In real terms, Constantinople had long ceased to be of practical political and military significance. Its importance rested on ideological and almost mythical grounds. From the earliest times, Constantinople had been the ultimate goal of the Muslim conquests, and its continuous presence in the Arabic Islamic texts throughout the medieval period reflects its symbolic importance as an ideal city representing the totality of the achievements of a grandiose Christian civilization. With the conquest of the Byzantine capital, one of the inveterate dreams and most cherished goals of Islamic ideology was realized.

The conquest of the city continued to be performed in Arab Ottoman texts well into the late seventeenth century. Wishing to underscore the importance of the conquest, the Ottoman historian, al-Qaramānī (d. 1019/1610), writes that "undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest and most glorious conquests. How many caliphs and kings had coveted its capture, investing their attention, effort and money, wasting their years and their soldiers to no avail." In his panegyric of the young Ottoman sultan, al-Qaramānī reiterates the Arab-Muslim textual tradition on Byzantium: Sultan Mehmet's only concern was the conquest of the great city, Constantinople the magnificent, one of the most vast, most populous, and best-fortified cities.[71]

Al-Qaramānī had to fit the conquest in the line of earlier predictions that go back to the early days of Islam. He does that by mentioning a contemporaneous prophecy predicting the exact time of Constantinople's conquest: Sultan Mehmet had sent his vizier, Aḥmad Pasha, to Shaykh Aq Shams al-Dīn and Shaykh Aq Bīq, inviting them to partake in *jihād* and be present with him at the conquest of Constantinople. Shaykh Shams al-Dīn announced to the vizier the good news of victory. He said: "You will conquer Constantinople, if God wills it, at the hands of the Muslims." When the Sultan entered the city, his vizier was standing next to him, and he said: "This is what the shaykh has foretold. . . . I do not rejoice in this conquest but in the presence of such a man in my time."[72]

Al-Qaramānī tells us how the kings of the world came to fear the sultan on hearing of this event. The rulers of Egypt, of the *ʿAjam* [non-Arabs], and of the Arabs sent him letters congratulating him on his feat. The Sharīf of Mecca wrote Mehmet the Conqueror, calling him "the one who has aided Islam and the Muslims, the Sultan of all kings and sultans . . . resuscitator of the Prophet's *sharīʿa*." To clothe this message with symbolic meaning, he informs Mehmet the Conqueror that his letter was opened and read "in front of the Kaʿba and in the presence of the people of Ḥijāz and the Arabs." He comments on the miracle of the conquest of Constantinople, "known for being indomitable in the eyes of all."[73] The indomitable city had fallen, to the surprise of all. With the fall of Constantinople, the millennial struggle between Islam and Byzantium was finally put to rest.

NOTES

1. Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl Tārīkh Dimashq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908), 173.
2. Claude Cahen, "La chronique abrégée d'al-Azimi," *Journal asiatique* 230 (1938): 353–448.
3. For the text of the treaty in English, see P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), 22–128; Mansouri, *Recherches*, 126–128; Marius Canard, "Un traité entre Byzance et l'Egypte au

XIIIe siècle et les relations diplomatiques de Michel VIII Paléologue avec les sultans Mamluks Baibars et Qalāūn," *Mélanges Gaudefroy-Demombynes* (Cairo, 1935–1945), 197–224.

4. Mansouri, *Recherches,* 117–123.
5. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā* (Beirut, 1987), 8:125–126.
6. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil,* 10: 282–285.
7. The terms *Crusades* and *Crusaders* were unknown to the Arab authors, both Muslim and Christian. *Ifranj* would continue to designate all of the Latins. Françoise Micheau, "Croisades et croisés vus par les historiens arabes chrétiens d'Egypte," *Itinéraires d'Orient: Hommages à Claude Cahen* (Brues sur Yvette, 1994), 169–194.
8. Muḥammad al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā,* ed. Mohammed Hajj Sadok, *Bulletin des études orientales* 2 (1968): 201; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab,* 12:258; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam,* 3:98.
9. Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār al-bilād wa akhbār al-'ibād* (Beirut, n. d.,), 530; Ibn Sa'īd, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā,* ed. Isma'īl al-'Arabī (Beirut, 1970), 177; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla* (Beirut, 1964), 283.
10. Muḥammad al-Idrisī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (Leiden, 1970–1984), 5:576; Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla,* ed. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār (Cairo, 1955), 20, 233, 249; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla,* 88; Abū Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt li ma'rifat al-ziyārāt,* ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus, 1953), 56.
11. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla,* 272; al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 531.
12. *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā',* ed. N. Riḍā (Beirut, 1965), 493–494.
13. Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1977), 67–74.
14. Alain Touwaide, "Pérsistance de l'héllénisme à Baghdad au début du XIIIème siècle: Le manuscrit ayasofia 3703 et la renaissance abbaside," *Erytheia* 18 (1997): 49–74.
15. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *'Uyūn,* trans. in Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London, 1965), 51.
16. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'ibar* (Beirut, 1979), 1:892.
17. 'Alī b. al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā',* ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), 29–30. A translation of al-Jazarī's sections on Constantinople is found in Mehmed Izeddin, "Un texte arabe inédit sur Constantinople Byzantine," *Journal Asiatique* 246 (1958): 453–457.

18. Mehmed Izzedin, "Quelques voyageurs musulmans à Constantinople an Moyen Age," *Orient* 9 (1965): 75–106.
19. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah,* 3:115, 130.
20. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'ibar,* 1:892.
21. See H. T. Norris, "Shu'ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres,* ed. Julian Ashtiany (Cambridge, 1990), 31–47; Gutas, *Greek Thought,* 151–152.
22. Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 530; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab,* 1:293–295.
23. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla,* 336; Marina A. Tolmacheva, "Ibn Battuta on Women's Travel in the Dar al-Islam," *Women and the Journey: The Female Travel Experience,* ed. Bonnie Frederick and Susan McLeod (Pullman, 1993), 119–140.
24. *Baybars I of Egypt,* trans. Seyedeh Fatima Sadeque (Dacca, 1956), 148.
25. Mansouri, *Recherches,* 135.
26. Philip Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn Munqidh* (London, 1987), 161.
27. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla,* 327–329. Andronicus was the cousin of Emperor Manuel, and he did kill his widow, as well as the young Emperor Alexius II. However, Andronicus did not fall in love with his cousin, although he was famous for his adventurous love affairs. The girl he married, after he became emperor, was the thirteen-year-old widow of Alexius II and the daughter of Louis VII.
28. Jamāl al-Dīn b. Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār banī Ayyūb,* ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1953), 1:253.
29. Emmanuel Sivan, "The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam," *Interpretations of Islam: Past and Present* (Princeton, 1985), 75–106. See also Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Une image musulmane de Jérusalem au début du XIIIème siècle," *Jérusalem, Rome, Constantinople: L'image et le mythe de la ville au moyen age,* Colloque de département d'études mediévales de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris, 1986), 217–233.
30. Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān* (Beirut, 1961), 19–25: 7; Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Cairo, 1329/1911), 7:163. See also Abdul-Aziz al-Duri, "Jerusa-

lem in the Early Islamic Period, Seventh–Eleventh Centuries A.D.," in *Jerusalem in History,* ed. K. J. Asali (Essex, 1989), 105–129.

31. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil,* 12:190–191.
32. Ibid., 12:192; Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb,* 3:160; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam,* 4:247.
33. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar,* 2, 486–489; al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-a‘shā,* 5:380.
34. Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit, 1984), 302–303, 316–317. See also Donald E. Queller, *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople, 1201–1204* (Philadelphia, 1977), 119; Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1988), 139.
35. Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-a‘shā,* 5:380–381; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar,* 5:862.
36. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar,* 2, 488.
37. Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 57; al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 603; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam,* 4:247; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar,* 1:127.
38. John de Joinville and Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades,* trans. M. R. B. Shaw (New York, 1984), 76.
39. Trans. in J. P. A. Van Der Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople* (Istanbul, 1980), 2:519. This negative view reaches its highest point after the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204. See Alain Ducellier, "Une mythologie urbaine: Constantinople vue d'occident au moyen age," in *Mélanges de l'école française à Rome: moyen age et temps modernes* 96 (1984): 405–424; M. Angold, "The Decline of Byzantium Seen through the Eyes of Western Travellers," in *Travel in the Byzantine World,* ed. Ruth Macrides (London, 2002), 213–242.
40. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān,* 146.
41. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq,* 2:209–210.
42. Reference in Armand Abel, "Un hadit sur la prise de Rome," *Arabica* 5 (1958): 1–14.
43. Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat,* 5:801.
44. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla,* trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952), 321–322.
45. Izeddin, "Un texte arabe inédit."
46. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla,* 351.
47. Ibid., 350–351.

48. Izzedine, "Quelques voyageurs."
49. Ian Richard Netton, "Tourist Adab and Cairene Architecture: The Medieval Paradigm of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James Bellamy,* ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton, 1993), 275–284.
50. Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 56.
51. Shams al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr fī ‘ajā'ib al-barr wa al-baḥr,* ed. M. A. F. Mehren (Leipzig, 1923), 227.
52. Al-Jazarī in Izeddin, "Un texte arabe inédit."
53. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla,* 351–352.
54. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla,* 49; al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 49. For descriptions similar to Ibn Jubayr's, see al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 605, and Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam,* 4:348–349.
55. Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 49.
56. Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 605–606; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā* 5:358. Writing in the late sixteenth century, the Ottoman historian al-Qaramānī (d. 1019/1610) is still talking about the talismans in Constantinople: "Serpents and snakes appeared in [Constantinople] and decimated men and cattle alike. Those who survived fled, and it remained empty for a while. Then, to drive these calamities away, one sultan [Byzantine emperor] . . . fabricated a talisman, possibly the bronze one now present shaped like three serpents." Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Qaramānī, *Akhbār al-duwal wa athār al-uwal fī al-tārīkh,* ed. Aḥmad Ḥṭayṭ and Fihmī Sa‘d (Beirut, 1992), 3:188.
57. Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq,* 801–802; al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 49–50, 56–57; al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 605. See Métivier, "Note sur l'hippodrome."
58. Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār,* 606; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil,* 3:3; al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr,* 227.
59. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ẓāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-malik al-Ẓāhir,* ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Khuayṭir (Riyad, 1976), 129, 131; *Baybars I of Egypt,* 148. For a similar passage with a commentary, see Mohamad Taher Mansouri, "La mosquée de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine d'après un manuscrit arabe (BN DE Paris)," *Vyzantiaka* 11 (1991): 117–127.
60. Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr,* 227; al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt,* 56; al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfyā,* para. 117; Manuela Marin, "*Rūm* in the Works of Three Spanish Muslim Geographers," in

Graeco-Arabica 3 (1984) : 109–117, and "Constantinopla en los geografos Arabes," *Erytheia* 9 (1988) : 49–60. See also Maya Yazigi, "*Ḥadīth al-ʿashara* or the Political Uses of Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 86 (1997): 159–167.

61. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,* 5:381.
62. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla,* 331.
63. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar,* 1:127; 2:488–489.
64. Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge, 1976), 1:55.
65. Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (London, 1965), 165–166.
66. Asterios Argyriou, *Les exegèses grecques de l'apocalypse à l'époque Turque (1453–1825)* (Thessalonica, 1982); Vryonis, "Byzantine Attitudes."
67. Souad Slim Abouelrousse, "L'impact de la chute de Constantinople sur les mentalités arabes chrétiennes à Alep au XVIIIème siècle," *Parole de l'Orient* 2 (1996): 199–213.
68. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar,* 1:579.
69. Ibn Tagrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-duhūr fī mada al-ayyām wa al-shuhūr,* ed. Muḥammad ʿIzz al-Dīn (Beirut, 1990), 2:453.
70. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr,* ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden, 1972), 2:316.
71. Al-Qaramānī, *Akhbār al-duwal,* 3:27.
72. Ibid., 3:29–30.
73. Text of letter in Abdel Jelil Temimi, "Les relations arabo-ottomanes à la suite de la prise de Constantinople en 1453," *Revue d'histoire maghrebine* 47–48 (1987): 257–266.

Conclusion

It has been a premise of this work that the image of Byzantium was conditioned by the fluctuations of Muslim-Byzantine relations, by the circumstances of the international conjuncture, and by the internal conditions of the Islamic world. This work has, furthermore, argued that the image of Byzantium was also shaped within the texts as the authors carried on a tradition inherited from previous ages. Bound as they were by the textual tradition and by the particular genre and conceptual framework within which they were operating, the authors and compilers reproduced the earlier conceptions of Byzantium's image but reformulated their sense of the Byzantine empire under novel and changed circumstances. This work has, moreover, maintained that the image of Byzantium in the Arabic-Islamic sources was used as a ploy to enhance the image of its Muslim counterpart. Thus, while the Byzantine empire was a real entity with which the Islamic polity had to deal with, Byzantium was also an imaginary category of difference against which Islam defined itself.

During the period of the Muslim conquests, at that crucial moment in the political and cultural contact between the two cultures, Byzantium suffered the loss of important territory while the Muslim armies expanded in virtually all directions.

The momentum of Muslim conquest was at its strongest during the periods of the Orthodox caliphs *(al-Rāshidūn)* and their Umayyad successors. This was the time of Byzantium's profoundest influence on the nascent Islamic civilization. The Arabic-Islamic texts tend to be favorable toward Byzantium when referring to these early encounters. This may be related to the monotheism of the Byzantines and to the respect that early Muslims had for the Byzantine political tradition embodied by one of its most prominent representatives, Emperor Heraclius. It may also be associated with the great admiration the Muslims had for Byzantium's material magnificence, as symbolized by the architectural monuments they had erected in Syria and the lustrous reputation of Constantinople. The texts are tireless in celebrating Byzantine skills in architecture, crafts, and the fine arts. Arab Muslim authors extolled the greatness of Byzantine civilization, and Arab Muslim rulers imitated various of its aspects. The focus of the early references to Constantinople was on its ultimate conquest. This concern was real since several Muslim armies besieged and seriously threatened the city in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. The tenacious resistance of the Byzantines relegated the conquest of the Byzantine capital to apocalypticism.

The transferal of the caliphate to Baghdad displaced the center of gravity from Byzantium to a more easterly milieu. These changes were accompanied by an increase in confidence, and the differences between the Arabs and the Byzantines came to be expressed in terms of superiority and inferiority, although this did not encompass all aspects of Byzantine civilization. The frontier separating the powers crystallized, imposing its own version of events. In Arabic-Islamic writings, the Byzantine empire became the only real "house of war," and the war against it the very model and prototype of *jihād*. The frontier between them separated the only two viable options, two rival powers struggling to exercise the *dominum mundi,* each possessing the necessary political, social, economic, and intellectual structures. The opposition of Arab Muslims and Byzantines—born of differences in religion, language, institutions, morality, and habits—marked the zone where these dichotomies most manifestly and frequently revealed themselves. Rejecting the moral and ethical system of the Byzantines as inferior, the texts reinforced their own adherence to what they saw as a superior moral system. The representation of Byzantine women, in particular, served as a polemical focus for the belittlement of Byzantine culture. The arguments relative to Byzantine knowledge reveal, however, the complexity of the representation, disclosing a multiplicity of perspectives and the presence of converging discourses.

By studying the Muslim representation of Byzantium, we not only come to some understanding of the relationship between these two great rivals, but we also gain insight into the formation of meaning through Islamic cultural practices. In their representations of Byzantine history, culture, and society, the Muslim authors gave legitimacy to their own history, culture, and society by means of their texts. Throughout, the image of Byzantium remains in the shadow of the Muslim self-image, and Islam's identity is reinforced. Authors were self-reflexive, deliberately framing anecdotes within particular contexts. This is, for instance, illustrated in the sharp criticism leveled against the behavior of the Byzantine military leaders in Syria on the eve of and during the Islamic conquests. Their treatment is colored by the notions of justice and rightful rule that were under discussion in the developing Muslim community. Criticisms of the corrupt Byzantine élite prepares the way for its replacement by a new self-righteous elite. The discussion of Greek science and philosophy is, similarly, self-referential. The rhetoric there was intertwined with internal intellectual and theological discussions and debates.

Under the direction of the Macedonian dynasty—and particularly in the course of the fourth/tenth century—the Byzantines took the offensive and effected substantial re-conquests of what had become Muslim territory. With the weakening of the central caliphate and the revival of Byzantium, Muslim hostility became patently obvious. Particular Byzantine emperors now received distinctly negative treatment due to their successes over the Islamic state and its rulers. This is most obvious in the textual tradition on Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, whose reign revealed, in unmistakable terms, the reversal of the two rivals' respective positions.

The assessment of the grand ceremonial of Byzantium together with the descriptions of the Byzantine capital imparts a sense of ambiguity. While the sources criticized the elaborate Byzantine ceremonial displays, which contrasted with the original simplicity of early Muslim rulers, the texts' initial condemnation is replaced, especially by the fourth/tenth century, with information of the elaborate displays taking place in the caliphal courts, in imitation of Byzantine splendor. The texts, similarly, persevere in performing the ambivalence felt toward the Byzantine metropolis—the mixture of attraction and repulsion, admiration and desire for appropriation.

The sources continued to use Byzantium as a structuring trope to denounce their own society and rulers. This is most evident in the poem of al-Qaffāl, which criticized flagrantly the Buyids. The weakness of Muslim defenses was presented as a consequence of the oppression and negligence of Muslim rulers and Byzantine victories as the product of the disunity of the Islamic world. The act of uncovering the Byzantine image presents us, thus, with some of the schemes developed by the authors to reinterpret aspects of their own history, their own self-definition, and their own view of the world. Hence, defining the Arabic-Islamic image of Byzantium is ultimately an exercise in defining the self-legitimating narration of Arab-Muslims.

With time, the Islamic caliphate and the Byzantine empire both survived to become acknowledged equals. A *modus vivendi* was established, and although there was a lack of real knowledge and understanding of the "other" on both sides, mutual respect and even a recognition that they shared the world between them did develop. However, at the same time, a deep vein of enmity and contempt remained beneath the surface. It is this duality, with its mixture of fascination and suspicion, that characterizes the Arabic-Islamic image of the Byzantines during most of the Abbasid era.

The new wave of Crusader conquests forced Muslim authors to view their traditional Byzantine foes, now greatly weakened, from a fresh perspective. Their reassessment of Byzantium was born of a fundamental change in political and military realities in the region that transformed the relationship between Orthodox Byzantium and the lands of Islam. Once the Muslims understood the religious and psychological motivations of the Franks, they were quickly able to distinguish between *al-Rūm* and *al-Ifranj*. Furthermore, the momentum gained from the new political alliance between the Byzantines and Saladin and, later, between the Byzantine and Mamluk states assisted in strengthening Muslim animosity toward the Franks, while the Byzantines were now viewed in much friendlier terms. The new prevailing conditions in the Near East provoked a certain shift in the contemporary image of the Byzantines and constituted a major influence in determining the selection of information on Byzantium and the resultant diversion from the previous pattern. Here again the Muslim image of Byzantium was seen to be shaped by a multitude of concerns, both internal and external and both textual and political. The sources reiterate earlier positive themes, discontinue a few negative motifs, and incorporate their new perceptions colored and accentuated by different filters and prisms, consequently affecting the traditional image. The later centuries reveal slight modifications and alterations of the Muslim tradition on Byzantium as it had principally been elaborated by the Abbasid texts.

The fascination with the city persisted until its fall in 1453. Irrespective of the level of access to "real" information, the Byzantine capital had always played a role in the Arab Muslim unconscious. The later texts depended greatly on the earlier textual tradition in their representation of the city. They produced and reproduced a textual universe that drew on common earlier themes, shaping some of them while sticking to the tendency of reducing the city to a handful of religious and imperial monuments. Nevertheless, these later sources were also quite aware of the internal developments that the city underwent. The discussion of Constantinople, as it developed in the course of centuries, embodied historical, religious, and textual variables that all together shaped the image of the city.

The fact that Islam, until the Ottoman conquest of 1453, never dominated the Byzantine world, colored the fundamental discourse with respect to its Orthodox Christian rival. It must also be emphasized that the relationship between the two was not hierarchical. The Arab Muslims did not see the Byzantines and their history as barbaric and uncivilized, nor the Islamic state as superior and the Byzantines as inferior: the two rivals were equal but different. The image of Byzantium is one of a civilization that possessed an admirable history and culture—although some of its aspects are presented as corrupt, degenerate, and irredeemable. Throughout, there is a clear and self-evident idea of "us" and "them," but behind this seemingly totalizing discourse exists a rich, diverse, and intricate image of Byzantium. Although their image represents the "other," Byzantium was not reduced to a kind of scapegoat for everything that the Arab Muslims did not like about the world surrounding them.

The vision presented in the Arabic-Islamic texts has necessarily been selective and subjective. This is quite natural, especially given the long history of political, religious, and civilizational anxiety inspired by interstate rivalry. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the discourse is vitiated. What is surprising is how temperate it is given that the classification in terms of polarity is one of the "main elementary forms of collective representation, and one almost universally encountered in cross-cultural discourse."[1] The texts do not convey an oversimplification of Byzantine civilization and openly praise certain of its achievements. The overall impression is one of demystification: very few areas of Byzantine civilization are treated as though they were strange and unfathomable. Hence, the Arabic-Islamic vision is neither monolithic nor reductively compartmentalized. Even more important, the texts reveal a capacity to comprehend and engage with the society, tradition, and history of a major rival.

On some levels and in some of its aspects, Byzantium is essentialized as a timeless abstraction due to the inability of most authors to perceive temporal and spatial distinctions—between past and present and between one place and another. Similarly, "knowledge" of Byzantium was often expressed in an unchanging idiom, although historical factors in each period determined, to some extent, the content of otherwise identical images. Byzantium's immediacy and its simultaneous divergence from familiar Islamic norms and reality meant that it was the perfect foil, a world apart. But although many of its features were viewed as too alien to be encompassed within the rubric of Islamic understanding and a certain degree of exaggeration made the two empires appear to be entirely distinct entities, Byzantium and Islam were not completely separate worlds. Their differences were not irreconcilable. Indeed, a perception that seems to be dominated by a rigid ideology, by a globality based on reductionist diagrams, still conveys nuances and distinctions that betray a deeper understanding than the one that is superficially projected, a wider comprehension than might be expected. While we cannot deny a definite imposition of patterns and values, a certain avoidance of detail, and, on certain levels, an absence of perspective, it has been impossible to collapse the representation into a simplistic division of Islam versus Byzantium.

Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs has attempted to provide an interpretation into the complex meaning of Byzantium in the Arab-Muslim literary tradition—the making and unmaking of this polemical entity, image, and identity. This wide and ambitious subject has been covered by a fraction of an immensely productive classical literary tradition. This study has tried to formulate an alternative appreciation to the politics of confrontation and hostility that so often underlies scholarly discourse on Muslim-Byzantine relations. Indeed, the connections between the two states and societies were complex and dynamic throughout, and the discursive production reveals a sophisticated apprehension of Byzantium and a conceptualization that transcends fatal binarisms and essentialist understanding.

NOTE

1. Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134–137 (1992): 3–18.

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